

UNSETTLED SPACES, UNSETTLED STORIES:
TRAVEL AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1799-1859

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
Of Cornell University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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August 2011

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Cornell University 2011

Unsettled Spaces, Unsettled Stories examines the narrative forms that emerge from travel and settlement during the early nineteenth century. Drawing on work in postcolonial settlement studies, the dissertation explores texts in which travel over fictional topographies (that sometimes reference actual geographies) is repeatedly met with physical ruptures. Spaces like *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym's* chasms, *Edgar Huntly's* cave, *The Confidence-Man's* Mississippi River, and the pit beneath Capitola's bedroom in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* simultaneously enact settler colonialism's work of disciplining space and historical narrative, and unsettle any such attempts. Through such images, these texts confront the always-fraught process of crafting settler spaces and settler histories alike.

Positing a "settler gothic" aesthetic that is concerned with the *process* of telling histories and of demarcating space and not only with how past histories haunt the present, *Unsettled Spaces, Unsettled Stories* positions fictional texts about travel, and texts that travel narratively, alongside historical travel narratives, from Columbus to Lewis and Clark. Settlement's unstable processes of geographic enclosure and historical narration, this project argues, begins with travel narratives that are themselves always unstable and contingent. And if the settler nation's unsettled process of plotting geographical space and plotting historical narrative finds a generic outlet in a gothic aesthetic that is in dialogue with the travel narrative, it also finds a formal

outlet in a fragmented, recursive “structure of serialization.” Drawing on the concept of seriality as a publishing form, as well as on concepts of rupture, movement, and repetition inherent to the idea of the “series,” this dissertation shows that texts characterized by serial structures enact how repetitive travel through geographical and narrative landscapes nevertheless fails to cohere. The texts read in this project harness formal, narrative instability to trouble the emplotment of territory as it supports emplotment of the past, indicating that the narrative of providential progress often said to have structured historiographical thought in the early nineteenth century was less pervasive than it has been made to seem.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melissa Gniadek is from the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts, where her interests in nineteenth-century American literature, history, and landscapes began, and began to intersect. She earned her A.B. in History and Literature of America from Harvard College in 2002, and her M.A. in English from the University of Auckland, New Zealand in 2005. While in New Zealand she was a Fulbright Graduate Student.

for my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a commonplace that there are more people to be thanked in an acknowledgement section than can possibly be mentioned. It's a commonplace because it's true. Everyone from the town librarians who fed me books in elementary school, to all the teachers I've had along the way, to the Ithaca neighbors who plant tulips all over their Fall Creek yards deserve thanks for encouraging me, or for unwittingly keeping me sane. But I'll attempt a degree of brevity.

First of all, the members of my dissertation committee at Cornell have supported this project from its inception. Shirley Samuels has always made herself available to discuss issues large and small, has helped me to think critically about my intellectual interests and my writing, and has shepherded a growing cohort of Americanists through the hallways of Goldwin Smith. Mary Pat Brady has provided a generous listening ear and helped me to find new direction and enthusiasm at critical junctures. Eric Cheyfitz's support for my work has been unflagging. He also introduced me to the Futures of American Studies program and helped me to attend that program when this project was first taking shape.

My lengthy list of acknowledgements also reaches back to much earlier days, however. Terry Flynn and Ted Vining deserve special thanks for their mentorship and support at Monument Mountain. They indulged my varied dreams and confusions, and my propensity to turn things over and over and over again, in a way that I always recognized as remarkable, but that I now recognize as exceedingly remarkable. Harvard's History and Literature program was the perfect place for me to land as an undergraduate, and John Stauffer guided me in productive directions. He also introduced me to Neal Dolan, whose intellectual camaraderie and attention to the intersection of my academic and personal investments made my final years at Harvard

incredibly rewarding. The excitement about ideas and about writing that I felt during that time continues to propel me forward.

Alex Calder at the University of Auckland helped me to land on my feet far from the Massachusetts home that had shaped so much of my thinking up until that point. He introduced me to a range of concerns and methodologies that I am still grappling with, and that have become part of the fabric of my work. For his willingness to respond to an e-mail from an unknown college student and for encouraging me to explore all aspects of New Zealand once I landed on those shores I am eternally grateful. Thanks are also due to Fulbright New Zealand for supporting me during my time there, both financially and through an incredible network of staff and Fulbrighters who became family away from family.

In Ithaca, I have been fortunate to be part of a true community, a family, of thinkers. Various groups and individuals have contributed to making my time at Cornell rich and pleasurable. The Historians are Writers! reading group, including Aaron Sachs, Daegan Miller, Amy Kohout, Heather Furnas, Josi Ward, Sarah Ensor, and many others, helped me to keep a sense of perspective, reminded me of the pleasures of reading good writing, and responded thoughtfully to my own writing over the past few years. The final years of work on this dissertation were also supported by two different Interdisciplinary Writing Group Grants funded by Cornell's Society for the Humanities. The members of the first group, Dianne Cappiello, Brigitte Fielder, Daegan Miller, Jon Senchyne, and Toni Wall Jaudon, provided generous feedback on versions of Chapters Three and Four. The members of the second group, Mari Crabtree, Sarah Ensor, Peter Lavelle, and Daegan Miller, helped me to reframe and rethink aspects of the project and generally provided much needed support, encouragement, and fun.

The conversations about history and literature that have taken place in each of these groups have helped me to revisit questions of great importance to me in new ways.

Cornell's Nineteenth-Century American Reading Group, founded at the beginning of my third year at Cornell, has been the hub of my scholarly wheel over the past years. Whether discussing texts in the living room of 211 Willow or traveling to conferences and reading groups together, this group has made life, literature, and scholarship inseparable in wonderful ways and the support of its members has been (and will continue to be) invaluable. Special thanks are due to Brigitte Fielder (baker extraordinaire), Alex Black (to whom I bequeath "the mug," but only in spirit), Kamila Janiszewska, and Toni Wall Jaudon. Jill Spivey deserves extra special thanks not only for being a key ARGer, but also for sharing the clubhouse with me. Ingrid Diran also shared the clubhouse and, at critical moments, her calm, good cheer. And Karen Bourrier deserves special thanks for bringing me to the clubhouse in the first place, for helping us all to think trans-atlantically, and for conceiving of what would become Cornell's Graduate Colloquium in the Nineteenth Century. Sarah Ensor offered her support and wisdom, and read and re-read these pages, helping me to untangle my thoughts and sentences with characteristic patience, care, and kindness. I accept full responsibility for the thoughts and sentences that remain tangled. Jon Senchyne helped me to figure out what I was trying to say, again and again. There should be an entry for "amazing colleague" in the OED with Jon's picture next to it. His generosity seems to know no bounds. The support and camaraderie of these kind souls, individually and collectively, means more to me than I can say.

Last, but certainly not least, thanks are due to my family. Mine is a large one – one in which layers and webs of interconnection, of place, are tight and real – and so my list of thanks is wide and deep, encompassing grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and landscapes. But in the

interest of space I'll thank my parents for cultivating a love of reading, writing, thinking, and working, and then for indulging those loves at extremes that I'm sure they never imagined. My parents made it possible for me to do what I do. Thanks also to my sister, Kimberly, and my brother, Gregory, for their patience, support, and, yes, indulgence. And finally, thanks to Devin for his amazing support and, yes, indulgence. He has listened to my ideas and interests evolve, challenged my thinking in various ways, and listened to my "sayings" with endless patience and love. I'm very lucky.

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Introduction

Toward the end of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, the eponymous Pym finds himself trapped in a series of interlocking chasms on a remote island. He is part of a group of men who have come ashore from the schooner *Jane Guy* to explore the island and to assess its potential economic value. The island's inhabitants initially appear friendly but prove hostile and cunning, orchestrating a landslide that kills all of the men on the island from the *Jane Guy* – all except Pym and his companion, Dirk Peters, a “hybrid,” the son of a fur trader and “an Indian squaw of the tribe of the Upsarokas.”¹ Pym and Peters happen to duck into a “fissure in the soft rock” of a ravine just as the landslide begins.² The two men then remain trapped in the chasms as the island's inhabitants move to the water to destroy the *Jane Guy* and its remaining crewmembers.

By the time Pym and Peters find themselves in this predicament, they have already endured many horrors. In the novel's first chapter Pym is convinced to embark on a nighttime pleasure cruise with his friend Augustus – an adventure that goes horribly wrong when their boat is wrecked by another vessel. Rather than cooling Pym's passion for the sea, this near-death experience fuels his desire for travel and exploration and, eighteen months later, Augustus conceives of a plan to smuggle Pym into the hold of the *Grampus*, a brig about to leave Massachusetts on a whaling expedition commanded by Augustus' father. Mutiny, shipwreck, and cannibalism follow; eventually Pym and the “hybrid” Peters are the only men rescued from the remains of the *Grampus* by the British *Jane Guy*, a rescue that anticipates their later escape from the landslide. The *Jane Guy* is on a voyage of scientific discovery (a voyage also, of

¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, in *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, Volume I, *The Imaginary Voyages*, ed. Burton R. Pollin, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 87.

² Poe, *Pym*, 181.

course, fueled by commercial interests) and once Pym and Peters are on board the captain decides to push toward the South Pole, a goal that Pym enthusiastically advocates when the captain's determination wanes. So it is that the crew of the *Jane Guy* find themselves on an unknown southern island, being led inland by a group of natives who are not as naive as Pym imagines them to be.

Pym and Peters spend the days after the landslide hiding in and exploring the chasms that save them. Pym measures and diagrams the spaces through which they move with the precision of a geological study: "Upon arriving within fifty feet of the bottom, a perfect regularity commenced. The sides were now entirely uniform in substance, in colour, and in lateral direction, the material being a very black and shining granite, and the distance between the two sides, at all points facing each other, exactly twenty yards."³ The two also examine "indentures" that they find in the wall of one of the chasms. Pym admits that "With a very slight exertion of the imagination" the indentures might be thought to resemble "alphabetical characters," an "idle opinion" that Peters adopts until Pym "convince[s] him of his error" by showing him flakes of marl on the floor of the chasm, "proving them [the indentures] to have been the work of nature."⁴ In short, Pym strives to continue the orderly work of exploring and documenting even while trying to escape from the chasms and island, and even as he encounters the unexpected and uninterpretable.

Soon after Pym's methodical recounting of the mysteriously cryptic "indentures" and of the chasms' shapes and sizes, his narrative adopts a frantic tone. He panics while climbing down the face of a precipice in a final attempt to escape the network of chasms. He is suddenly "pervaded with a *longing to fall*; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable...there

³ Poe, *Pym*, 193.

⁴ Poe, *Pym*, 195.

came a spinning of the brain; a shrill-sounding and phantom voice screamed within my ears; a dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure stood immediately beneath me; and, sighing, I sunk down with a bursting heart, and plunged within its arms. I had swooned, and Peters had caught me as I fell.” On recovering, Pym notes that his “trepidation had entirely vanished,” that he “felt a new being, and, with some little further aid from my companion...reached the bottom in safety.”⁵

Following this episode, Pym and Peters manage to escape from the island in a canoe, taking a native captive along with them. Turning their canoe into a sailboat through the addition of a mast, they head southward, encountering increasingly unusual sights until, weeks after their departure from the island, they approach a “cataract” with “wide, yawning, but momentary rents.”⁶ As they approach, “a chasm [throws] itself open to receive” them, there arises a “shrouded human figure” with skin “of the perfect whiteness of the snow,” and the narrative suddenly ends. This inconclusive conclusion has provoked endless speculation and readings that interpret the white figure as everything from death to knowledge to a self-projection to the whiteness at the bottom of the page.⁷

The disorientation of travel and encounter within *Pym*, and the disorienting nature of a text like *Pym* that travels narratively, both through geographical space within its fictional world and through its own formal dynamism, reproduces the disorientation of cross-cultural contact and subsequent attempts at settlement, and dislocates the historical master narratives built on

⁵ Poe, *Pym*, 198. Some critics have interpreted this moment in terms of a death instinct, reading Pym’s pleasurably petrifying desire to fall into this void as a desire to escape into nothingness by completing the rehearsals for death that he has made throughout the novel. (See J. Gerald Kennedy, *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 170-71; John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 186.) Others have read it as a desire to return to the origins of the self. (See Dennis Pahl, *Architects of the Abyss: The Indeterminate Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 46-47.)

⁶ Poe, *Pym*, 205.

⁷ Poe, *Pym*, 206.

such moments. Through an aesthetic of fragmentation, and through conventional gothic imagery embedded within Pym's travel narrative, the novel complicates dominant American tales of exceptionalism and providential progress that collapse time and space in visions of "destiny."⁸ Instead, it uses the images of the rockslide and the chasms to depict the collapse of those narratives.

When I first read *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, I was landlocked in upstate New York. But I read it as if I was on a beach in the South Pacific, looking back at the United States across thousands of miles of open ocean.

I am certainly no Arthur Gordon Pym. Yet I once left Massachusetts for a distant island myself. It would, I thought, be a good idea to get away. I wanted to see American literature from the "outside."

I had not heard of the "spatial turn" when I boarded a plane to fly to New Zealand. I did not know that I was participating in the burgeoning field of transnational American studies. I knew that one summer I had stumbled upon Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*, initially drawn to it by nothing more than a colorful blue binding on someone else's bookshelf. After devouring it, as one does with summer reading, I realized that perhaps it had devoured me. I started to read all of the New Zealand literature and history that I could get my hands on, and to think about New

⁸ As Stephanie LeMenager puts it, American expansionist discourse can be seen to rely not only on an association between movement forward in time and space and progress, but on a "characteristic collapse of continental space into providential temporality." "The rhetoric of expansion turned the varied cultures and climates of the North American West into 'destiny,'" LeMenager continues, "a simple temporal marker of the nation's future settlement" (*Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2004), 3).

Zealand in relation to American literature and history. I was struck by similarities, and differences, between these distant nations' pasts. So I dreamed up a plan to study nineteenth-century American and New Zealand literature comparatively, secured the support of a faculty member in New Zealand and, miraculously, secured funding. I'll admit that I also knew that New Zealand was beautiful. People who had visited or lived there told me that it still felt like a frontier in many ways. Knowing that this was a problematically romantic notion even as I not so secretly hoped that it was true, I settled in for a long trip in an enclosed cabin. (Perhaps there's a bit of Pym in all of us.)

During my years in New Zealand I was exposed to a type of postcolonial settler studies that, for me, began with the space of contact "on the beach" and the work of unstable sense-making that resulted – unstable sense-making that eventually became the always fraught historicizing, the always co-signed status of the settler as he or she works to impose new meaning in a space that already has other meanings.⁹ There is a tradition of critical engagement with settlement studies in New Zealand, as in other settler nations such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa. It is a tradition that emphasizes questions surrounding land and geography, belonging, and narrative that are very much part of the present in such places. In New Zealand, for example, the rulings of the Waitangi Tribunal, established in 1975 to make recommendations

⁹ Greg Denning's metaphor of beaches as "cultural boundaries" ringing islands ("cultural worlds") gives a sense of spatiality to narratives of Pacific encounter and contact – narratives that take on new problems when visitors decide to stay and to appropriate space as their own (*Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980), 20). As I discuss later, aspects of the fraught (il)logic of contact carry through to the (il)logic of settlement. For work on settlement in the Pacific/Australasian context and in comparative contexts see, for example, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature, 1872-1914* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), the work of Alan Lawson (for example, "Postcolonial Theory and the 'Settler' Subject," [1995] in *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, ed. Cynthia Sugars (Peterborough, Ont; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004), 151-164), Chris Tiffin, Alex Calder (the "Introduction" to F.E. Maning's *Old New Zealand and Other Writings* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2001), for example), and Stephen Turner ("Settlement as Forgetting," in *Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia & New Zealand*, ed. Klaus Neumann, Nicholas Thomas & Hilary Ericksen (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999).

on Maori claims for reparations or claims relating to breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), are often part of the daily news in a way that would be unimaginable in the United States. Of course, the level of audible discourse surrounding such issues should not be overemphasized, nor should decades of silence surrounding issues of colonial settlement be ignored. Nevertheless, part of what I found when I went to New Zealand was an engagement with settler colonialism as distinct from concepts of colonialism and imperialism – an engagement with narratives that, consciously or not, wrestle with what happens when people from “away” come to stay and to make a new home in a space that others already call home. In New Zealand this engagement is not merely academic. It is very much part of the present.

When I eventually returned to the United States, then, I returned through the fluid space of the Pacific – through various “beaches” of contact and spaces of persistently unsettled settlement. I came back to America’s eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thinking not about the formation of a young nation and the crafting of national identity, but rather about problems of contact and settlement often relegated to the early modern period in the Americas. 1787 was no longer the year in which the American Constitution was signed and the nation born. It was also the year when the First Fleet left Great Britain, bringing convicts to Botany Bay where accounts of contact with aboriginal peoples echo accounts in Christopher Columbus’ journals, written centuries earlier. 1814 was no longer the year in which the Treaty of Ghent ended the War of 1812. It was also the year in which the Church Missionary Society set up permanent shop in New Zealand’s Bay of Islands. Indeed, the conclusion of the Treaty on December 24th may well have coincided exactly with the first recorded Christian service in New Zealand on that Christmas Day. Time and space fold over on themselves when the history of the Americas is

viewed through a global lens. Yet these were thoughts that merely haunted me when I first returned to the geographical space of the United States. They could not yet be made explicit.

Indeed, there is a sense in which such comparisons can never be explicit. There are as many versions of colonial encounter and settlement as there are spaces being settled, groups doing the settling, and populations being displaced in the process.¹⁰ Historical and geographical specificity always matters, and to deny that specificity is to risk collapsing critical differences. The narration of the United States' particular history has, perhaps, obscured the work of settlement in a way that differs from other settler nations, making study of the rhetoric of settlement necessarily different. Narratives of revolutionary American exceptionalism make the United States always already inevitable, while tremendous amnesia about the treatment of Native Americans, combined with the violence of centuries of African-American slave labor, makes the United States situation distinct, though certainly not extraordinary. When I stood in front of a room of American undergraduates in a course on Australian and New Zealand literature and history in the fall of 2007 and we discussed the fact that, at that point, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were the only four countries to vote against the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it was clear that shared settler pasts intrude on the present.¹¹ It

¹⁰ See, for example, Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) for different acts of "possession." See David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) for an example of a cultural history of how different settler's practices resulted in different "New World" settlements.

¹¹ The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007. One-hundred and forty-four states voted in favor of the Declaration, four voted against it, and eleven states abstained. Since then, the four counties that voted against the Declaration have all endorsed it, though not all have formally signed the Declaration. For example, on December 16, 2010, President Obama announced that the United States would sign the Declaration, but as of May 2011 that apparently has not officially occurred. (See "Native American Activist, Author Winona LaDuke on 'The Militarization of Indian Country' and Obama Admin's 'Lip Service' to Indigenous Rights," Democracy Now, May 6, 2011, Transcript http://www.democracynow.org/2011/5/6/native_american_activist_author_winona_laduke, Accessed May 14, 2011.) The reasons offered for initially voting against the Declaration varied from concerns

was clear that while differences matter immensely, so too do similar frameworks warrant attention.

In the years since my return across the Pacific, postcolonial settlement studies has started to solidify as a distinct field of study internationally and, more recently, it has begun to make inroads into American literary studies.¹² In many ways, its concerns are not new. Works like Richard White's *The Middle Ground* and William Cronon's *Changes in the Land* might be seen as precursors to contemporary work as they confront some of the complexities of North America's history of Euro-American settlement. It remains to be seen precisely how American postcolonial settler studies might consolidate and move forward, however, drawing on work done in other settler nations in order to better attend to the "messiness" of the United States' stories about itself, to issues of indigeneity and race, and to the doubleness of the settler subject within both historical sources and literature, broadly construed.¹³ The promise of a settler postcolonial reading practice is, as Edward Watts has recently put it, its ability to recognize "a tenuous balance between the 'settler' as colonized and colonizing," to move beyond "the *binary*

about rights and access to land, to issues of self-determination, to the very definition of "indigenous" - all concerns that speak to the legal and narrative complexities of settler societies.

¹² Recent works that take up settler colonialism in national or comparative contexts in various disciplines (including history and literature) include Lorenzo Veracini's *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Annie E. Coombes, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, (Palgrave) 2006); Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Edward Watts, "Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy" *Early American Literature* (joint issue with *American Literary History*), Volume 45, Number 2, 2010, pp. 447-458. In addition Veracini has recently launched a settler colonial studies blog and the first issue of the new journal *settler colonial studies* will be published in 2011.

¹³ See Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts, *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Lawson, 156.

of empire and resistance...conceptualizing the *simultaneity* of settler identity.”¹⁴ As such, a reading practice attentive to the always unstable problems of the settler allows us to acknowledge the heterogeneity within well-known texts – to acknowledge how certain texts work to articulate a sense of settler belonging that is always also tenuous, that demonstrates the instability of that belonging. Such a reading practice also allows us to encounter texts that have not received much attention in more “supple ways.”¹⁵

Some might argue that this work threatens to give renewed voice to settlers – to white, male writers who craft and reproduce stereotypical representations of indigenous peoples, of landscapes. But reading for how the depictions within such authors’ writings unsettle themselves allows us to examine the historical complexities at play and how those complexities bear on the present. It allows us to acknowledge the “incompleteness and incoherence” of the settler nation and of its literature, to think about how that incoherence persists, and how it continues to be ignored. As Nicholas Thomas writes of “breaking down” the “unitary idea” of white unity in imperial efforts, the point, “is not some perverse argument that colonialism was not really as vicious or unpleasant as has previously been thought...What I want to establish, rather, is that a wider and more plural formulation changes the way we perceive the present; in particular, I hope it equips us better to contest contemporary forms of colonial culture which tend not to be recognized as such.”¹⁶

Unsettled Spaces, Unsettled Stories, then, focuses on the literature and history of the United States, but it grows out of an engagement with postcolonial settlement studies in an international context. It draws upon settlement studies’ sense of the plurality of the problems of

¹⁴ Watts, “Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Practice,” 459, 462.

¹⁵ Watts, “Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Practice,” 463.

¹⁶ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 10.

settlement and its engagement with how settlement is narrated as it explores texts in which travel over fictional topographies (that sometimes reference actual geographies) is repeatedly met with physical ruptures. Those ruptures, I argue, like *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*'s chasms, represent challenges to the intertwined settler processes of enclosing territories (that must first be "emptied") and narrating histories of those geographical spaces. In the chapters that follow, spaces like Edgar Huntly's cave, the Confidence-Man's Mississippi River, and the pit beneath Capitola's bedroom in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* are shown to simultaneously enact settler colonialism's work of disciplining space and historical narrative, and to unsettle any such attempts. Through such images, these texts openly wrestle with the always-fraught process of crafting settler spaces and settler histories alike, as attempts to rationalize space and to craft linear narratives collapse.

My dual focus on the processes of delimiting geographical space and crafting historical narratives posits these processes as the most essential challenges facing colonial settler societies – the challenges that must be confronted in order for settlers to claim belonging that is simultaneously never quite belonging. "A *settler* colonial project," as Lorenzo Veracini has recently written, "is predominantly about territory." "Settler citizenship is seen as conditioned on *property of* - and *residency on* - the land."¹⁷ In turn, claiming territory creates "a conflictual relationship with history...typical of a settler consciousness" as alternative entitlements, alternative pasts of place, are re-appropriated or, more often, denied.¹⁸ Settler appropriation of space, settler enclosure through various acts of possession, creates the need to craft, to enclose, linear historical narratives of belonging that are also always narratives of dispossession, frequently structured around racial difference.

¹⁷ Veracini, 81; 80.

¹⁸ Veracini, 90.

I further suggest that the processes of enclosing geographical space according to Euro-American standards, marking it as known, as “rationalized” (whether through narrative, mapping, or treaties), and the processes of crafting historical narratives that give shape to the project of settlement, are intertwined through the persistent use of spatial metaphors for the work of narrating history, metaphors that take on particular import in the settler colonial situation.¹⁹ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as now, writers meditating on the process of historical narration frequently mention filling in gaps or building structures, so that the work of enclosing a particular narrative of the past (and a narrative of future possibilities) is articulated in terms similar to those used to render geographical or physical space familiar and “usable.”

Within the rhetoric of settler colonialism, spatial metaphors for the work of narrating history overlap with what Veracini calls a “cluster of orientational metaphors” for the work of

¹⁹ In the past few decades much attention has been paid to the processes by which space is made known, particularly to the evolution of Western cartographic traditions which were inextricably intertwined with processes of exploration and colonial settlement, and to alternative, indigenous conceptions of space. See, for example, the multi-volume *History of Cartography* edited by J.B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987-) and the essays collected in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999). Examination of the construction of space through mapping has influenced scholars of the early Republic and nineteenth century who have increasingly attended to how geographical mapping and thinking structured space and spatial knowledge in early America. In the past decade we have often been reminded that disciplining, mapping, teaching, and learning space was an integral part of constructing the American nation. See, for example, Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Bill Hubbard, Jr., *American Boundaries: The Nation, The States, The Rectangular Survey* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009). Important work has also exposed antebellum anxieties about geographic formlessness, “nebulous boundaries and spatial uncertainty,” emphasizing how space and spatial knowledge remained open, unbounded, and troubled. See Anne Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) for discussion of the “complicated, multifaceted impact on American culture” that the growth of the United States and “the geographical uncertainty it engendered” had during this period (1). See LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies* for discussion of heterotopic spaces that challenge national histories. See Mark Rifkin, *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) for discussion of how Native Americans (including Black Hawk) and former Mexicans protested legal narratives attempting to absorb them into national space. Other recent treatments of America, geography, and space include Martin Brückner and Hsuan L. Hsu, *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500-1900* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007) and Hsuan L. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

settlement. These metaphors include movement “*forward* towards the *backwoods*, the *backcountry*, the *backblocks*, the *outback*, and so on; [the settler’s] claim becomes ‘higher’ the closer it is to the soil, and the ‘depth’ or ‘shallowness’ of a settler claim is a recurring issue of great concern.” Settlers claim land “in the context of a language that refers to ‘higher use’, and assimilation policies are recurrently designed to ‘uplift’, ‘elevate’, and ‘raise’ indigenous communities.”²⁰ And, of course, “Progress” is typically conceived of as movement forward. The future is ahead, while indigenous populations are “behind” and belong to “the past.”²¹ Links between spatial metaphors for the arrangement of “facts” in crafting historical narrative and spatial metaphors for the process of settlement (conceived spatially and temporally) thus reinforce one another in unique ways within the (Western) settler colonial context, where enclosing space and crafting coherent historical narratives become central to the work of claiming belonging.²²

Throughout this project I use the term “emplotment” to suggest intersections between enclosing space and crafting historical narrative. “Despite its apparent simplicity of reference,” writes Hilary Dannenberg, “*plot* is one of the most elusive termini in narrative theory. The repeated attempts to redefine the parameters of the term are symptomatic of the extreme complexity of the temporal dimension of narrative and indicate that “plot” itself is too complex

²⁰ Veracini, 20.

²¹ See, for example, Johannes Fabian’s concept of the “denial of coevalness” in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

²² Recent work in narratology reinforces that we make sense of narrative by drawing upon our experiences with our physical, spatial environments. We make sense of the narratives we tell about time and history similarly. Thus, in the Western tradition we face the future, move forward in time, and look back to the past. But, of course, other traditions think about time and space in different terms. One of the first things that I learned about traditional Maori culture when I arrived in New Zealand is that Maori and other Oceanic peoples think of the past as being in front of them. (Though this articulation of the concept is probably an oversimplification.) One’s back is to the future since it cannot be seen. One does not know what is there, whereas one can see the past. This made perfect sense to me. Underlying this project is, then, not only a fascination with how we think about encounters with narrative spatially in the Western tradition, but also an awareness of differing conceptions of time and space that meet in spaces of colonial contact that become the spaces of histories and historical narrative.

to be satisfactorily enclosed (or “plotted”) by one definition.”²³ Even in arguing for the elusiveness of the term, Dannenberg codifies the link between plot and spatial enclosure or “plotting.”²⁴ This link is at the heart of this project’s attention to how the texts discussed within it contain a spatial discourse of historiographical process and haunting that is linked to territorial enclosure, or at least to purported knowledge of the land. But, in keeping with settler postcolonialism’s focus on the unsettling, unsettled nature of settlement, my focus will, in general, be on the act of “emplotment” as a fraught, unfinished business rather than on “plot” as a closed-off physical or narrative entity. Though, as Dannenberg points out, “plot *is* the telling,” and so is always an active process, Paul Ricoeur’s use of “emplotment” to refer to “the dynamic character of the configuring operation” is closer to the sense of attempted historical or spatial sense-making that I intend here.²⁵ Much as Walter Mignolo distinguishes between “enactment” and “representation” in his discussion of New World colonial situations to emphasize the always negotiated status of encounter rather than the discourse of the colonizer imposed on the colonized, I intend to point to the always unfinished work of narrating the past and narrating space in these texts of settlement (as a result of challenges presented by alternative discourses and histories), even as my focus is on that struggle as it manifests itself largely in writing by those “colonizers.”²⁶ My use of the term “emplotment” reinforces Patrick Wolfe’s statement that

²³ Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 6. Dannenberg goes on to offer an extremely helpful summary of plot theory in the pages that follow (6-9). Her chapter on “Spatial Plotting: Paths, Links and Portals” is particularly relevant to my focus on tensions between linear spatializations of time in historical and fictional narrative and gaps or ruptures in that linear spatialization (65-85).

²⁴ This link is also emphasized by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 11-12.

²⁵ Dannenberg, 6; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 1, Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65. Hayden White is, of course, best known for discussing historical narrative in terms of “plotting.”

²⁶ “Representation is a notion I have tried to avoid as much as possible in my argument. If I say that I was interested in how European peoples and communities constructed the idea of the self-same instead of in how they “represented the other,” it is because my interests are located more in *enactment* than in

in settler colonialism “invasion is a structure, not an event.”²⁷ But, I add, it is a structure without a fixed form - a structure always enmeshed in a process of making and unmaking so that the plotting of space and the plotting of historical narrative that will support an exceptional settler future is always unfinished, unsettled, and compromised.

My interest in fictional topographies like *Pym*’s chasms is thus in how they serve as geographical spaces, indeed, structures, that can be made momentarily meaningful within *Pym*’s logic – emplotted within his story of the island’s past as he measures, diagrams, and narrates a history that denies evidence of previous histories – and also in how those spaces, along with *Pym*’s narrative, essentially collapse. Physical gaps and narrative gaps coincide as physical space and historical narratives of that space refuse emplotment. My interest, then, is in asking what happens if we find not (only) echoes of specific historical events or traumas in the texts discussed here (African-American slavery in *Pym*, for example), but (also) a more open indication of the *process* of narrating history more generally – an awareness of problems of not knowing, of not being able or willing to relate, that attends the project of historical narration, particularly in settler colonial contexts where alternative histories (of indigenous inhabitants, for example) are never far from the surface. What happens if we attend to the topographical ruptures within narratively fractured texts that simultaneously take up settler spaces and the process of crafting settler histories? What happens if we leave these texts open to dislocation

representation; or, if you wish, in *representation as enactment*. But this formula may defeat the purpose of changing the perspective of analysis by changing the premises under which the analysis is carried out...the concern with the representation of the colonized focuses on the discourse of the colonizer, and one forgets to ask how the colonized represent themselves, how they depict and conceive themselves as well as how they speak for themselves without the need of self-appointed chroniclers, philosophers, missionaries, or men of letters to represent (depict as well as speak for) them” (Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* Second Edition, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003 [1995]), 331-332).

²⁷ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London, New York: Cassell, 1999), 3.

and disorientation rather than shoveling interpretation into their gaps? *Unsettled Spaces*, *Unsettled Stories* arises from a commitment to retaining the productiveness of such openness and disjuncture. It argues that acknowledging the incomplete (and incompletionable) work of U.S. settler formations can help us to recognize processes of attempted meaning-making that pertain today.

Of course, the chapters that follow present page after page of interpretation, but my focus remains on the unsettled nature of historical and literary texts. And while each text discussed here exemplifies, in its own ways, the questions about historical narration and land circulating within this project, each also must be recognized as a choice to foreground certain texts over others, thereby necessarily creating gaps in a literary narrative. While this is true of any study – texts and historical events will always necessarily be elided – in this case I elide not to construct a coherent narrative, not to ignore the gaps, but to acknowledge them. It is not my intention to be comprehensive, but rather to plumb the depths of specific texts and moments for what they can reveal about larger issues.

It bears mentioning, however, that many of the authors discussed here – Poe, Brown, Melville, Lippard, Southworth – are among those we now think of as openly critical, or at least questioning, of the status quo and of dominant power structures. These are authors we might expect to take on the paradoxes of settler colonialism. But what is notable about spatial metaphors for the narration of history in the first decades of the nineteenth century is how pervasive they were, and how they exhibit a number of conflicting ideas about the narration of history as it relates to the settlement of land, to the enclosure of space, even when harnessed by historical figures whose attitudes as “colonizers” might seem more uniformly settled.

For example, William Gilmore Simms swept across the landscape of the United States with stereotypical tales of Indian warfare, racist depictions of African-Americans, and tales of Euro-American dominance in his historical and fictional writing. He epitomizes a certain kind of celebration of frontier violence, and has often been read for his contributions to creating a distinctly Southern literary tradition, and for his interest in crafting a uniquely American literature. As an author of historical romances in the tradition of Scott and Cooper and a supporter of the Young America movement, it has been easy to dismiss Simms as a known entity and to ignore the internal dissonance within his work. I argue, however, that exploring how authors like Simms struggle to negotiate the tensions of colonial settlement within their work will help us to develop a more nuanced account of how settlement's many pasts play out in the present. For now, I want to draw attention to Simms' articulation of a position often associated with twentieth-century theorists like Hayden White: that facts are chosen and arranged in a narrative by the historiographer. Historical narrative is not given or absolute. The particular choices that Simms himself made in narrating historical conflicts need not prevent us from recognizing these broader ideas within his thinking, or from recognizing how plotting stories and land are and are not linked in Simms' account of the work of historicizing.

Like so many authors in the antebellum period when writing history and writing fiction were not the separate disciplines that they would become later in the century, Simms was both a historian and a fiction writer who meditated on the relationship between history and narrative, recognizing that "raw facts, no matter how carefully assembled, never truly speak for themselves."²⁸ In "The Epochs and Events of American History, as Suited to the Purposes of Art

²⁸ Sean R. Busdick, *A Sober Desire for History: William Gilmore Simms as Historian* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 6.

in Fiction,” a series of lectures delivered in 1842, Simms acknowledges and strongly defends the constructed nature of history. He points out that numerous thinkers (“Walpole, Raleigh, Bolingbroke and many others”) had treated history as fiction and describes history as “that art which draws, by a happy judgment, the matured fact from the embryo, and, by a series of successful speculations, leads us to those perfect narratives of life in society which the world has agreed to honour with the name histories.”²⁹ Simms rejects the nihilistic skepticism that can result from this recognition of history as constructed “perfect narratives,” however, seeing such a view as taking the “breath of life” from the nostrils of history, leaving only “dry-bones.”³⁰ Such a view of history becomes an “articulated skeleton.”

Art, according to Simms, breathes life into history’s nostrils and animates the disinterred “rickety skeleton,” reclothing its “dry-bones.” It is, according to Simms, “the artist only who is the true historian. It is he who gives shape to the unhewn fact, who yields relation to the scattered fragments, - who unites the parts in coherent dependency, and endows, with life and action, the otherwise motionless automata of history.”³¹ As with Charles Brockden Brown’s reflections on historical narrative, discussed in my second chapter, the work of creating a useful history is given a spatial component, extended in Simms’ imagery of exploration, of digging up and animating skeletons and relics of the past: “The long analysis of probabilities keenly pursued through buried fragments and dissolving dust, is the toil of an active imagination, informed by experience...The dull seeker after bald and isolated facts is no philosopher...He is a digger merely; -no more a discoverer than the hireling whom superior taste and wealth have employed

²⁹ William Gilmore Simms, “The Epochs and Events of American History, as Suited to the Purposes of Art in Fiction,” in *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History, and Fiction*, First Series, ed. C. Hugh Holman (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 31.

³⁰ Simms, “Epochs,” 33. In a note, Simms indicates that he is specifically responding to “that class of modern historians, the professed skeptics of all detail in ancient history, of whom M. Niebuhr is the great example.” He refers to German historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr.

³¹ Simms, “Epochs,” 36.

to disencumber the buried city...from its ashes.”³² Simms sees every man as being his own historian, “permitted to argue his case as an advocate, to choose his favourite personages from the chronicle, and to make perfect his ideals, by a nice adaptation to their known characteristics,” as long as that interpretation does not fly in the face of “facts which are known and decisive.”³³ For Simms, then, there are definitive facts about the past, but the arrangement of those facts is a project of making “perfect...ideals.” The importance of history lies in its ability to elevate aims, inspire hope, and inculcate morals rather than in any kind of “intrinsic truth.”

The true historian is an artist who has the “capacity for supplying appropriately the unsuggested probability, of filling the blanks in history with those details without which the known were valueless.”³⁴ To that end, the moments and episodes best suited to the artist’s/historian’s pen are those that have receded from memory and that have become blurry enough so that no one will dispute the way the event is narrated. America, being young, lacks the shadowy vagueness that enables imagination and the emplotment of greatness as in ancient, epic histories, but Simms assures his listeners that the passage of time will provide that needed distance. When “doubt and obscurity” surround the past then “scope” and “provocation to conjecture” are available. The imagination is “left free to spread its most daring wing” and “With such a wing, and such a flight,” Simms proclaims, “what a bird’s eye view of wonders shall we attain!”³⁵ The historical distance that Simms feels necessary for the type of construction, the plotting of the past, that he associates with “perfect narratives of life in society” is here associated with physical distance, allowing one to see a kind of master structure or narrative.

³² Simms, “Epochs,” 36-37.

³³ Simms, “Epochs,” 37, 38.

³⁴ Simms, “Epochs,” 42. Here, Simms once again echoes Charles Brockden Brown’s language and reasoning, especially in terms of notions of “probability” as it relates to the project of historical narration.

³⁵ Simms, “Epochs,” 125.

This perspective is not yet available to America, according to Simms. Nevertheless, in the meantime he offers suggestions of historical characters - Benedict Arnold, Hernando de Soto, Pocahontas – whose lives and adventures he sees as having the potential to be dramatized and to fit into standard epic narratives. (Unsurprisingly, Simms had already written histories of these figures.) In outlining how these stories should be told Simms uses shorthand summaries that make it clear that the goal here is not originality, but rather the placement of American history into standard, accepted models of heroism and greatness that will advance nationalism and nation-building. For example, “The usual narrative of ocean caprice ensues,” Simms quips in the process of outlining how the settlement of the American colonies should best be recounted.³⁶ History worth narrating fits into standard models of narration – into standard plots.

Simms’ lectures exhibit a number of conflicting ideas about the narration of history. It is, ideally, the work of the artist, yet it should adhere to expected standards; it is not relativistic, relying on “facts which are known and decisive,” but those facts should not interfere with the desired narrative. As a Southern apologist for slavery and a historian who abided by narratives of progressive, but cyclical, civilization, Simms represents someone who, while recognizing the constructed nature of historical narrative, unabashedly harnessed the work of historical narration for his own ends. Nevertheless, the metaphors that he uses, the images of digging into the ground and re-articulating skeletons, explicitly link spatial arrangement and rearrangement with the work of narrating history in a way that always seems unsettled and unsettling.

For Simms, the work of emplotment is explicitly the work of giving form to shapelessness, not only by animating the dry-bones of a dangling skeleton, but also by giving shape to the nation (imagery that conjures a long tradition, reaching back to early explorers, of imagining the space of the Americas in terms of bodily metaphors). But, oddly, he states that

³⁶ Simms, “Epochs,” 103.

giving form to shapelessness may only be truly possible once the country no longer exists, once it is in “ruin,” in “decay” and “desolation”:

We prefer looking at the country, naked as it is, unadorned, a rough, unhewn mass – shapeless to the eye, - unsightly, perhaps, in other eyes, not blinded by our feelings of sympathy and home! We look at the waste map from Passamaquoddy to the Sabine, and ask, - where are *our* treasures, - our jewels of song and story, - which, when our country shall have become venerable with years, - in ruin perhaps from frequent overthrow, - shall inform the groping nations what she has been, and yield to them, even in her decay and desolation, models of excellence not inferior to those which we owe to the genius of the East.³⁷

Here the country is shapeless, a “rough, unhewn mass” lacking unifying narratives – “jewels of song and story” - imagery that again merges the plotting of space and of narrative. Yet while Simms imagines unified and unifying narratives for the nation at a point in the distant future, at no point does he envision the nation as successfully spatially unified. It goes from “waste map” to “ruin,” its intermediary excellence only captured in future “song and story.” In these lectures, then, Simms exemplifies the rhetoric of American nationalism that we associate with the nineteenth century, but this seems to outlive or supersede the geographic plotting of the nation. Spatial and narrative coherence never occur concurrently. Simms pens historical romances that plot America’s past into recognizable forms. Yet at the same time those forms are never adequate. He cannot quite give shape to the “rough, unhewn mass” of the settler nation.

Like Simms, Edgar Allan Poe draws a distinction between “naked facts” or an “annalistic journal” and a historical narrative of those facts in his review of Francis L. Hawks’ *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of the United States of America*, published in 1836, two years before *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. “Naked facts” were, Poe writes, “to be subsequently

³⁷ Simms, “Epochs,” 48.

arranged and shaped into narrative by the pen of the historiographer.”³⁸ But, unlike Simms, Poe never undertook a history himself. The one history-like document that he did begin – his planned book-length survey of American literature, *Literary America* – was, however, partially realized in a series of periodical essays, “The Literati of New York City.” Following Isaac Disraeli’s works on literature, which, according to Poe, contained bits of information “marshaled together...in disorderly array, pushing, jostling, and crowding each other” yet comprising “a vast amount of out-of-the-way intelligence,” Poe’s essays followed no particular order. Poe explained, “As any precise order or arrangement seems unnecessary and may be inconvenient, I shall maintain none. It will be understood that, without reference to supposed merit or demerit, each individual is introduced absolutely at random.”³⁹ This refusal to draw connections and to formulate a grand narrative of American literary history resonates with (the fictional) Poe’s refusal to fill the “vacuum” with explanation in *Pym*’s final explanatory “Note.” Leaving Pym and Peters hovering over an abyss in a canoe as they escape from the island, Poe, “the gentleman whose name is mentioned in the preface, and who, from the statement there made, might be supposed able to fill the vacuum,” refuses to fill the void “for satisfactory reasons connected with the general inaccuracy of the details afforded him, and his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter

³⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, Review of *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of the United States of America – Virginia* in *Edgar Allan Poe, Essays and Reviews* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 557. In a scathing, tongue-in-cheek 1845 review of George Jones’ *Ancient America* Poe notably played with typographic symbols on the title page in a way that resonates with his play with the symbols in *Pym*’s chasms. “There is a limit, however, to the capacities of the pen,” Poe writes after reproducing the text of the title pages. “We can convey with that instrument a good deal, to be sure (and Mr. GEORGE JONES can convey even more than ourselves,) but...there is an end even to the expression of a goosequill. Were it not for this, we should be happy to fill up, in an adequate manner, the *hiatus* of our just above, and of our O a few sentences farther up. We will endeavour to aid the reader’s fancy, however, in filling them up for himself” (*Essays and Reviews*, 645). The review then goes on to tell the reader exactly what to imagine in the place of those typographical symbols. By pointing to the work of interpretation within a review of “ancient America” Poe not only pokes fun at Jones but also uses symbols to point to the work of interpretation when imperial America encounters past imperial Americas more generally.

³⁹ See Kevin J. Hayes, *Poe and the Printed Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100-101.

portions of the narration.”⁴⁰ As in “The Literati of New York City” where Poe refers to the work of arrangement as “unnecessary” and “inconvenient,” the fictional Poe within *Pym* leaves the work of narration, of interpretation, to the reader.

To say that Simms and Poe represent different historical methodologies would be unfounded, though Poe’s unwillingness to narrate looks very different from Simms’ call for standard modes of narration and standard historical plots. But the fact that they both draw a distinction between the chronicle of facts and the emplotted work of historical narration indicates, at the very least, that an awareness of the process of constructing historical narrative was circulating at the time. Furthermore, their descriptions of the process of crafting historical narrative remain persistently spatial: the bones of the past are arranged, are given shape. The vacuum is filled, or not, at the discretion of the narrator. And perhaps Poe’s refusal to arrange, to fill, represents an alternative form of emplotment, one that more directly implies the contingency that consistently creeps into Simms’ discussion of narrating the history of an “unadorned,” “rough” settler nation.

Of course, the metaphors employed by Simms and those implied by Poe – those of “filling the blanks,” reclothing history’s “dry-bones,” digging for facts, and giving life to the “otherwise motionless automata of history” – are metaphors that are frequently used to talk about the work of telling history today. Many contemporary historiographical essays speak of “filling in the gaps” (as a necessity, a danger, or a bit of both). Mark Carnes writes of “novel history” as reanimating “the fragmentary and fossilized facts of the historical record...with imaginative

⁴⁰ Poe, *Pym*, 207.

meaning and aesthetic truth.”⁴¹ In *Sapelo’s People: A Long Walk Into Freedom*, a history of an island off the coast of Georgia, of the slaves who once lived there, and of their descendents who still call the island home, William S. McFeely writes that “archives and ‘sources’” provide “an armature on which to fix the scattered, solid bones of the receding history.” (But he finds that activity, in the case of Sapelo, to be an empty endeavor. The history he explores, he concludes, is Sapelo’s peoples’ history; it is a living, feeling history that the bones of archives and sources cannot capture.)⁴²

These metaphors and images are often now harnessed to tell precisely the stories that were elided in nineteenth-century histories, to counter the violence of historical narrative as crafted by someone like Simms. When Saidiya Hartman writes:

it is hoped that the instances of insurgency and contestation narrated [in *Scenes of Subjection*] and the relentless proliferation of small acts of resistance perhaps offer some small measure of encouragement and serve to remind us that the failures of Reconstruction still haunt us, which in part explains why the grand narratives continue to hold sway over the imagination. Therefore, while I acknowledge history’s “fiction of factual representation,” to use Hayden White’s term, I also recognize the political unity and ethical necessity of historical fiction. As Walter Benjamin remarked, “Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe if the enemy wins,

she harnesses the language of haunting, of giving voice to the dead, that has become central to histories that counter “master narratives.”⁴³ At the same time, she emphasizes the potential for history and fiction together to work toward reclaiming lost pasts. When, in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, she writes of “reclaim[ing] the dead,” of “the afterlife of slavery,” of the gaps and silences of lives “deemed unworthy of remembering,” she evokes not

⁴¹ Mark C. Carnes, “Introduction” to *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America’s Past (and Each Other)*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 24-25.

⁴² William S. McFeely, *Sapelo’s People: A Long Walk into Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 157-158.

⁴³ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14, emphasis in original.

only the past's place in the present (and the present's place in the past), but also the work of reaching into the gaps of the past to give voice to what has been elided.⁴⁴ I will return to these issues in a brief coda, and to the question of what it means to think about tensions surrounding the work of narrative and spatial emplotment in the settler context in relation to postcolonial discourses of haunting, gaps, and reclamation.

By now it will be clear that *Pym*'s confining chasms and Simms' "dry bones" and "dangling skeletons" suggest the Gothic, or rather a gothic aesthetic, as the generic locus or articulation of the problems of geography, historical narration, and settlement that lie at the heart of this project. Indeed, questions of genre and form are central to my engagement with the literature of settlement. Of course, as America's quintessential nineteenth-century "Gothic" writer, it is not necessarily surprising that Poe should conjoin issues of space and the narration of history. Haunted houses, cold cells, and dark passageways appear throughout classic Gothic texts. These spaces have been read as metaphors of various oppressions (of women, for example) and fears (of Catholicism, for example). They have lent themselves to a critical focus on interiority and the unconscious, and also to a critical focus on history.⁴⁵ In her study of Sir Walter Scott and the Gothic, for example, Fiona Robertson writes of British Gothic's "complicated relationship to historical knowledge... The pretence that their novels were based on manuscripts – fragmentary, indecipherable, or unreliable – allowed Gothic writers to develop a narrative form which could maintain suspense while also suggesting the incompleteness of

⁴⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6; 16.

⁴⁵ Robert Mighall writes of the Gothic "as a 'mode' rather than a genre, the principal defining structure of which is its attitude to the past and its unwelcome legacies" (*A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xix.)

historical evidence.”⁴⁶ The genre, she writes, developed “a complex relationship both to historical verisimilitude and to the accepted processes of authentication.”⁴⁷ These reflections on historical processes are, at points in Robertson’s reading, significantly linked to spatial imagery, as ruins make architecture “the focus of a search which is really about ways of telling, or narrating,” as “narrative and historical processes are repeatedly figured as tortuous approaches through hidden subterranean passageways to a secret which may finally be revealed, but which can never be an adequate recompense for the terrors of the quest.”⁴⁸

Robertson’s discussions of architectural recesses and of “passages that lead to nothing” epitomize readings of the European Gothic tradition.⁴⁹ The American Gothic, on the other hand, is often associated with the wild landscape of the New World rather than with crumbling castles. In essence, the land often becomes the architectural metaphor (as in *Pym*), concealing histories that may or may not be revealed, but which nevertheless haunt. Indeed, the American Gothic has often been distinguished from British Gothic traditions through a focus on land, cross-cultural contact, frontier violence, and race, and has often been read as a literary tradition that grapples with how America is haunted by its violent history, a history necessarily repressed to facilitate the work of settlement.⁵⁰ But I suggest that we can see a gothic aesthetic within the texts

⁴⁶ Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 87; 89.

⁴⁷ Robertson, 93.

⁴⁸ Robertson, 17.

⁴⁹ “Gothic: The Passages That Lead To Nothing” is the title of Robertson’s book’s second section.

⁵⁰ The history of criticism on American Gothic often begins with Leslie Fiedler’s well-known readings in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960). For Fiedler, as for many who were to follow him, the American Gothic is at its core a psychological phenomenon, “a Calvinist exposé of natural human corruption” centered around “the heathen, unredeemed wilderness and not the decaying monuments of a dying class” (147, 148). According to Fiedler’s readings, “certain special guilts awaited projection in the gothic form,” guilts that included “the slaughter of Indians” and “the abominations of the slave trade” (127). Both the past and the landscape – “the heathen, unredeemed wilderness” – were, then, central to his psychoanalytic interpretations of “Gothic,” but in a general manner revolving around archetypes.

discussed in this project as emerging from the always compromised, always simultaneously settled and unsettled, status of settler colonialism so that American Gothic can also be thought of in relation to a Settler Gothic that is preoccupied with and haunted by the unstable *process* of claiming territory and claiming a past and future in a settler space rather than by particular historical episodes or injustices.⁵¹ (“Invasion is a structure, not an event.”)

More recent work has explored specifically situated historical (particularly racial and imperial) aspects of the Gothic. The work of Teresa Goddu, Jesse Alemán, Shelley Streeby, Justin D. Edwards, and the contributors to the collection *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, for example, has built upon psychoanalytic readings of the gothic, showing that America’s ideals and its realities cannot be separated from – indeed are themselves built upon – the terrors and hauntings foregrounded by the Gothic and its counterpart, sensation fiction. America is, according to these readings, haunted by its history, specifically its history of race, racial violence, and racial ambiguity. It is haunted by the inconsistencies between its professed democratic ideals and its oppressive, imperialistic realities. Realities that have been repressed in order to construct national myths – in order to reinforce American exceptionalism and stories of providential progress – from slavery and imperialism to female oppression and exploitive market forces, persistently return to plague the present. (It is in such readings that *Pym*’s pit with the Indian at the bottom might become an instance of the return of a repressed past and present.)

See Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Jesse Alemán, “The Other Country: Mexico, the United States, and the Gothic History of Conquest” in *Hemispheric American Studies*, Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008): 75-95; Shelley Streeby and Jesse Alemán, “Introduction,” *Empire and the Literature of Sensation* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003); Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy, eds. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998). The late 1990s in particular saw a surge of criticism seeking to situate the Gothic historically rather than psychoanalytically, or to historicize psychoanalytic readings. This project was also taken up by scholars of British literature. See, for example, Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmare*. While Streeby and Alemán focus on “sensation” fiction I include their work here because of the close relationship between a gothic aesthetic and sensation fiction, and because I want to emphasize the openness of generic categories. The categories of “gothic” and “sensation” fiction, “while not identical,” as Dana Luciano notes, “refuse simplistic principles of distinction.” Gothic “has always relied on sensational strategies,” and sensation fiction “cannot be fully understood without reference to the gothic tradition that preceded and shaped it and which it revitalized” (“The Gothic Meets Sensation: Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, George Lippard, and E.D.E.N. Southworth,” in *A Companion to American Fiction, 1780-1865*, ed. Shirley Samuels (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 315).

⁵¹ Such attention to the relationship between the Gothic and awareness of the fraught process of historical narration has recently been taken up by Dorothy Z. Baker in *America’s Gothic Fiction: The Legacy of Magnolia Christi Americana* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), which argues that various nineteenth-century authors take up Cotton Mather as providential historian in their Gothic tales, countering and writing against such providential designs. And Mark Kamrath’s *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown: Radical History and the Early Republic* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010) also intervenes in these issues.

In my focus on texts in which travel over fictional topographies is repeatedly met with physical ruptures I further posit that travel, and more specifically the travel narrative, is foundational to the Settler Gothic that I describe. As settler colonialism emerges as a distinct field of study it does so by dissociating itself from colonialism and imperialism. The settler stays, while the colonist or imperialist retains his or her connection with the metropole and, often, returns. But, I argue, even as we acknowledge settler colonialism as a distinct formulation with structures and problems that differ from the “colonial,” settler colonialism always begins with colonial encounters that later become settler colonial encounters. Cross-cultural contact always precedes settlement. Thus, the significant critical literature on colonial encounters that frequently, as Veracini points out, attends to issues of “agency and constructed meaning,” must inform studies of settler colonialism. The meaning constructed about moments of cross-cultural encounter often becomes the basis of later settler colonial histories, and the process of sense-making in those moments (ignoring contradictions, filling in gaps in knowledge) is another manifestation of the attempted production of coherent narrative central to settlement. In the chapters that follow, then, fictional texts about travel and texts that travel narratively, like *Pym*, appear alongside of historical travel narratives, from Columbus to Lewis and Clark, revealing that the settler nation’s fraught parallel processes of geographic enclosure and historical narration begin with the cross-cultural contact of travel narratives that are themselves always unstable and contingent.

Finally, if the settler nation’s always unsettled process of plotting geographical space and plotting historical narrative finds a generic outlet in a gothic aesthetic, it also finds a formal outlet in a fragmented “structure of serialization.” Only my final chapter deals with texts that were published serially, but the other chapters treat texts that are similarly fragmentary or that

may have had their origins in serial publication. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, with its sudden plot twists and its inconclusive conclusion, can be taken to epitomize this fragmented, recursive structure, in part, perhaps, as a result of its origins in the serial form. In thinking about serial structures then, I reference a publication form but, more generally, I refer to the notion of repetition and fragmentation embedded in the idea of serialization. While seriality is often associated with linearity (in the sense that one installment follows another) and with unification (in the sense of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" brought together across space through print culture) I invoke the concept to point to narrative, and spatial, repetition that is precisely non-linear and that fails to unite or to settle, just as novels published serially in the nineteenth century were often sprawling and repetitious, leaving many loose ends.

The connection between seriality, spatiality, and motion is one that deserves more attention. Of course, this connection lies beneath work (like Anderson's and Michael Warner's) that makes seriality central to ideas of the nation and the public sphere. (Such work, as Ed White points out, has made seriality "something of a degree zero for early American culture.")⁵² White himself has recently examined material and cultural manifestations of seriality in eighteenth-century agrarian Pennsylvania as part of his study of the early Republic from the perspective of the "backcountry." The "series" of agrarian populations, White shows, is "not a unified mass, but an inactive gathering of reciprocal isolation; not a society mystically at one with the countryside, but a collective of individuals facing the counterfinality of their praxis; not a unified rural culture but a common-being-outside-oneself-in-the-other, a culture of traveling rumors."⁵³ In this context the series can be negative, a liability, as individuals are spread out and thus weakened. Or it can be empowering – a mode of resistance. Tracing a story of a shift from

⁵² Ed White, *The Backcountry and the City: Colonization and Conflict in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 30.

⁵³ White, 35.

backcountry seriality defined by disparate, independent settlements dotting the countryside to loose fusion, to notions of institutionality, White provocatively encourages us to think about the influence of peripheries and peripheral movements in early America.

White's attention to seriality, drawing on Sartre's theorization of the concept, focuses largely on social and cultural manifestations of the series – of fragmentation, dispersal, and repetition – and while he retains a sense of unsettlement throughout his book, his trajectory is nevertheless from seriality toward a degree of unification. I want to extend the repetition and motion of the social “series” into texts characterized by the formal repetition of seriality, and to think about a narrative and spatial unsettlement and fragmentation associated with the repetition of seriality that persists through the nineteenth century. Characters in the texts I discuss repeat the same actions and move through the same spaces over and over again, but those spaces and actions fail to cohere, as the reader's experience of the text fails to cohere. Formally, readers are often left teetering at the brink of that classic serial narrative device, the “cliffhanger,” unable to bridge gaps in narrative incoherence or fictional topographical incoherence implied by the term.⁵⁴

My attention to formal structures of seriality also grows out of my attention to the travel narratives whose concerns, I argue, are reproduced in the context of settlement in the fictional texts discussed here. Such narratives are organized linearly in the sense that they are largely chronological. One day follows another, especially in narratives written as journal entries. Yet that temporal linearity is belied by the repetitive nature of travel in which one day's events often look much like other day's events, and in which encounters with new places and peoples are often recounted in terms of familiar places and peoples. (This tendency to make the unfamiliar

⁵⁴ Of course, this term was not coined until the twentieth century, but the phenomenon that it describes was certainly present in earlier periods.

familiar through comparison to “old” worlds is one of the features of narratives of colonial encounter that persists in the logic of colonial settlement.)

Furthermore, ostensibly linear articulations of America’s “Progress” westward in space and forward or “up” toward “civilization” are often, in fact, repetitively serial in the sense that “Progress” occurs through a series of cycles. From Crèvecoeur’s “frontier man” whose movement west is a return to presumed simplicity, to Turner’s conception of “a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion,” even the United States’ most infamous images of linear “Progress” are marked by a sense of repetition and return.⁵⁵ If, as Lorenzo Veracini claims, the narrative form of colonialism is a circular narrative of return and the idealized narrative of colonial settlement is linear (settler colonials come to stay), the narratives discussed in *Unsettled Spaces*, *Unsettled Stories* complicate that binary, showing settler colonialism to, in fact, be repetitious and persistently unsettled, even as it imagines its linearity. Ultimately, then, this project emphasizes how the fiction it treats *enacts* anxieties about the very *process* of telling that imagined linear history in a colonial settler context (where telling history is always about claiming land), turning what might otherwise seem to be historical or historiographical problems into literary, formal ones.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782); Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 2. Turner continues: “Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnishes the forces dominating American character.”

⁵⁶ Of course, challenges to ideas about the “truth” of History, to ideas of linear progress or dialectical thought, to universals, have been central to critical thought over the past decades thanks, in large part, to the work of Michel Foucault, whose “genealogical” work (indebted to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche) has indelibly shaped thinking about the construction of histories. (See, for example, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984 [1971]): 76-100.) Certainly the work on constructions of space and narrative referenced throughout this project, like my own work, is indebted to Foucault’s thinking in various ways.

Each of the following chapters moves backward and forward in time and around the terrain of the United States though, for the most part, the earlier chapters deal more explicitly with contact, encounter, and settlement, while later chapters attend less to problems of first contact and more to long-term instabilities of settlement and the histories it produces. The first chapter is an exception in that it treats *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, published in the middle of the time period that is this project's focus, and set outside the space of the United States. My reading of *Pym* emphasizes the relationship between narrating encounter and narrating history in that text. The novel, with its celebration of territorial exploration and exploitation and its simultaneous ambiguity about the success of that project and the possibility of narrating it, epitomizes this project's exploration of early nineteenth-century American fictions that treat mapped and claimed spaces and historical texts as artifacts of constructed "realities."

The second chapter, "*Edgar Huntly*, History, and the Epistemological Crisis of the Travel Narrative," turns back to the "time-space compression" of early-modern exploration that some see as heralding the beginning of "modernity," reading Charles Brockden Brown's 1799 novel *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799) as a colonial travel narrative, aligning the work's gothic aesthetic and the epistemic crisis frequently seen at its center with a long history of writing in and about America – of first-person narratives that become foundational histories despite their gaps and incongruities.⁵⁷ In *Edgar Huntly*, as in *Pym*, the reappearance of the hallucinatory texture and epistemological questioning and disconnect found in the earliest Euro-American writings – travel narratives written by visiting Europeans or early colonists – positions

⁵⁷ On the time-space compression of early modern travel see, for example, Jerry Brotton, "Terrestrial Globalism: Mapping the Globe in Early Modern Europe," *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove.

the novel within a tradition of writing in and about the New World that extends back to the first narrative fruits of “the field of investigation, opened” by the continent.⁵⁸ In extending the psychoanalytic readings typically applied to this novel to the nightmare of travel and encounter in an unfamiliar realm, this chapter brings the domestic space traditionally associated with the Gothic into dialogue with the externality of travel, blurring and reorienting interior and exterior spaces through Edgar’s infamous somnambulism and his own fall into a pit. Space becomes incoherent in *Edgar Huntly*, in part through the repetitious sleepwalking that brings an aesthetic of episodic seriality into the text. Attempts to create “rooms” of knowledge fail, resulting in a travel narrative of gothic crisis rather than one of successful colonization, and in a narrative that highlights the unsettling involved in settling. This reading of *Edgar Huntly* is brought into conversation with Brown’s own writings on the nature of history and historical narratives – writings that raise epistemological questions similar to those that emerge in the incoherence of travel: namely, whether or not there can be any “truth” to narratives of the past constructed of evidence about which there can be no certainty.

The project’s spatial scale shifts from Edgar’s cave, unstable “rooms of knowledge,” and a Pennsylvania land grab to the watery realm of the Mississippi River in the third chapter, “The Mississippi’s Fluid Forms.” This chapter brings *Pym*’s Oceanic fluidity into its exploration of the image of the Mississippi as a fracture in narratives of national emplotment rather than as a line in a story of providential progress or a metaphor for national unity. The chapter first moves west from the Mississippi, up the Missouri with Lewis and Clark, considering how lacunae in the record of their famous expedition may result from challenges to spatial knowledge and to an ability to narrate space. It then moves back and forth across the Mississippi with Black Hawk, whose *Autobiography* (1833) is a hybrid document whose editors attempted to bound events,

⁵⁸ Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, ed. Norman Grabo (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 3.

making them known, even as the narrative resists bounding through physical, temporal, and narrative movement. Euro-American conceptions of narrative are tied to land claims and to the “text” of coerced treaties through the notion of emplotment, linked, in this chapter, to Western writer and historian Judge James Hall. Hall stands at the confluence of Black Hawk’s *Autobiography* and the “Indian-hating” sections of Herman Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* (1857) as representative of a “type” of historical narration against which both texts are positioned (even as Hall’s own writings, like Simms’ writings, must be recognized to be less uniformly settled than they are usually acknowledged to be). Melville’s Mississippi novel, through its fragmented formal qualities, disconcerting gothicism and irony, and references to Hall, uses a surreal tale of travel on the river to comment on the issues of historical “emplotment” raised by Black Hawk’s narrative.

The fourth chapter, “Serial Fictions and Panoramic Pasts,” examines images of historical and territorial “conjuncture” (reminiscent of *Pym*’s chasms and of *Edgar Huntly*’s cave) in works characterized by a fragmented structure of serialization. E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand or, Capitola the Madcap* (1859), George Lippard’s *’Bel of Prairie Eden* (1848), and the Egan-Dickenson moving panorama, *Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley* (1850), all complicate notions of linear progressive historiography through images of geographical and temporal collapse. The pit beneath Capitola’s bedroom in *The Hidden Hand* and the panoramic palimpsests of Lippard’s novel and the moving panorama together present alternative cultural histories that evoke unsettled historical perspectives.

Finally, a coda looks ahead to Suzan-Lori Park’s *The America Play* (1994) in which “the Great Hole of History,” ideas of replication and repetition, and the repeated injunction to “keep it tuh scale” focalize intersections between the geographical and narrative gap as it relates to a long

tradition merging problems of incompleteness and challenges to “knowledge” in the narration of America’s settler history with the disorientation of a gothic aesthetic.

More than being Gothic, psychological abstractions or evidence of “the instability of America’s self-representations,” the texts addressed in this project probe the very process of constructing those self-representations through structures of narrative and structures of space that become the structures of history.⁵⁹ Questions about what can be known of the past and present in a colonial settler context are linked to questions about what we are willing to know or to acknowledge about that past or present. By examining the dynamics of travel, of encounter, of claiming physical space as property and of claiming authority through knowledge as these issues are represented through a gothic aesthetic, and by examining how “structures of seriality” reinforce the narrative gaps and topographical drops within such fiction, this project probes the tensions inherent to historiographical and territorial emplotment in a settler nation, as represented in its fiction.

As *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* leaves readers struggling to interpret its winding chasms, endlessly trying to imagine a location and a history for Pym’s mysterious island, the texts examined here challenge knowledge of geographies and pasts, reminding readers of the work involved in constructing such knowledge. Drawing on themes of travel and exploration that were popular when it was published, *Pym* simultaneously invokes a long history of these themes’ intersections with foundational histories of the Americas. “Shipwreck, captivity, and travel” were, as Ralph Bauer notes, among the “central motifs recurring in early modern prose narratives about the Americas.”⁶⁰ In destabilizing stories about travel and shipwreck, Poe destabilizes individual historical narratives as well as larger metanarratives built upon such

⁵⁹ Goddu, 10.

⁶⁰ Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

individual narratives. In beginning with *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and narratives of “discovery” and encounter that inform narratives of settlement, I suggest that American literary studies’ engagement with the narrative genres and forms of settler colonialism might begin where mine did: looking back at the United States from the ocean, from an island, from the beach.

Chapter One: Writing (on) Space in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

Published in 1838, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* emerged on the American literary scene toward the end of a decade often associated with the economic and territorial expansion of Jacksonian America and the codification of stories of American nationalism. Andrew Jackson left office the year before, having set in motion the wheels of expansion, in part through the Indian Removal policies that would result in the infamous “Trail of Tears” (1838-39). In 1834, two years before Poe began work on *Pym*, George Bancroft published the first volume of his *History of the United States of America*, which would solidify a historical narrative of American providential progress associated with Jacksonian faith in American individualism and the promise of geographic expansion, a history that would repress issues of slavery and of the Indian removal underway as it was being written.¹

While a text like Bancroft’s might aspire to give a sense of narrative unity to history, Poe’s novel emphasizes historical fragmentation. While Bancroft’s history might seek to make the past legible, Poe points to the assumptions involved in creating legible narratives and to the

¹ The kind of history written by someone like George Bancroft can easily become a too stable point of reference and of critique. Bancroft’s work is not a monolith. It is complicated in its own ways. Nevertheless, it represents an influential white, Northern, elite historiographical vision that can be taken as representative of what we tend to think of when we think about nineteenth-century master narratives. It is in that sense that I occasionally invoke a “type” of history associated with someone like Bancroft, while still recognizing the extent to which doing so elides other complications. Here I follow recent critics like John Ernest and Lloyd Pratt who find themselves harnessing dominant narratives about dominant historiography in order to complicate them. Ernest, writing of the risk of turning Bancroft into “a virtual manifestation of the white nationalist historical project” concludes that he “offers a particularly prominent and influential example of an approach to American history – informed by [his] acquaintance with the work of Herder, Hegel and others, and shaped by [his] own political involvements as a Jacksonian democrat – that looked for its authority in a vision of the ‘folk’ and that argued for a providential design underlying all human history” (*Liberation Historiography: African-American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 34). Nevertheless, the unsettling aspects of a settler society must be recognized to inform every effort to craft coherence.

persistent threat of illegibility. Although set outside the geographical space of the United States and seemingly more concerned with moments of contact than with settlement, *Pym* allows us to rethink the literature of American settlement in the first half of the nineteenth century in the context of global circuits. Its engagement with the conventions of travel narratives and the histories built upon them, as well as with contemporary fantasies about exploring, claiming, and narrating South Pacific and polar spaces (satirized in works like the early science fiction novel *Symzonia* (1820)), situates *Pym* within early nineteenth-century concerns about expansion at home and abroad, and about crafting narratives that work to rationalize that expansion. In the space of Tsalal's chasms, *Pym* confronts relationships to land, people, and histories that are at the heart of the colonial settler situation, complications that the reader is prepared for by the assumptions surrounding travel and encounter that pervade the novel.

Voyaging in the Gulf

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym puzzled readers who fell for its hoax when it was first published (it purports to be a true story), and has puzzled readers ever since.² As Poe's only "complete" novel it has long seemed to be something of an anomaly. Its existence is sometimes attributed to Harper and Brother's refusal to publish Poe's collection "Tales of the Folio Club." In explaining this decision, Wesley Harper wrote that "detached tales and pieces" were not usually successful in book form. "Readers in this country," Harper continued, "have a decided and strong preference for works (especially fiction) in which a single and connected story

² For discussion of the relationship between *Pym*'s status as hoax and the travel narrative see Paul Lyons, "Opening Accounts in the South Seas: Poe's *Pym* and American Pacific Orientalism," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 42, no. 4 (1996), 313; Lisa Gitelman, "Arthur Gordon Pym and the Novel Narrative of Edgar Allan Poe," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47, no. 3 (1992 Dec), 352; Poe, *Pym*, ed. Pollin, 18.

occupies the whole volume, or number of volumes, as the case may be.”³ Poe began writing *Pym* that same year, in 1836.

Yet *Pym* is hardly the “sustained tale” that Harper might have imagined. Not only is its bizarre ending inconclusive; the entire work is comprised of episodic fragments and text lifted from other texts. Burton Pollin identifies nearly forty sources for the novel and estimates that nearly one-fifth of the narrative is paraphrased from those sources.⁴ At the same time, the influence of other Poe stories such as “A Tale of Jerusalem” and “MS. Found in a Bottle” is well documented.⁵ *Pym* is a text of travel and movement in many senses, navigating back and forth across the spaces between narrative modes, references, and historical and literary sources. Poe patched together “detached tales and pieces” in writing the novel after all.

Indeed, *Pym* had its beginnings in the story papers that were Poe’s primary publishing venue.⁶ Its first chapters were published in two installments in the *Southern Literary Messenger* a year and a half before the novel was published in its entirety. Poe probably began *Pym* as a short serial for the *Messenger*, but when he was fired from the magazine in January 1837 its publication there ceased. He probably worked on additional sections at various times over the

³ Quoted in Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 1809-1849* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987), 212.

⁴ Poe, *Pym* ed. Pollin, 17-28. This was not necessarily uncommon at the time. Many texts were comprised of not quite digested parts. As Cathy Davidson notes of the early American novel in general, it “fed upon and devoured more familiar literary forms such as travel, captivity, and military narratives; political and religious tracts; advice books, chapbooks, penny histories, and almanacs. It also appropriated nonliterary forms such as letters...or diaries as well as traditionally oral forms of culture such as local gossip, rumor, hearsay, folktales” (*Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 71). But, as I discuss, *Pym*’s borrowings and the novel’s resulting formal qualities become intricately connected to its content.

⁵ See, for example, Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, ed. Richard Kopley, (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), xxv; J. Lasley Dameron, “Pym’s Polar Episode: Conclusion or Beginning?,” in *Poe’s Pym: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 36-38.

⁶ Though Poe did eventually champion the short story and the periodical form over book length narratives for aesthetic and artistic reasons, he also wrote that he found himself trapped in the “magazine prison-house” (“Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House,” in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Volume XIV, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 160-163).

coming months, contributing to the work's fragmented aesthetic, and he may have intended a sequel, or at least may have planned to leave the ending open enough to allow for that possibility.⁷

Pym's form, then, might be seen as a product of (and commentary on) market forces in the antebellum publishing world, but its fragmentation has also become central to interpretations of the novel, as the novel has become increasingly central to studies of Poe's work. Its mystifying ending, its playful frame narrative that asserts truth even as it problematizes questions of truth and authorship, its episodic qualities, and images such as the mysterious note that Pym receives from Augustus while he is entombed as a stowaway in the hold of the *Grampus* (a note that should have writing on both sides, but does not, and that Pym must piece together from fragments after he rips it up, finally revealing seven cryptic words written in blood) have led many critics to explore the play of representation and language within *Pym* and to assert that the novel is about writing and the indeterminacy of textual meaning. It is also, many have contended, metafictional and metaliterary in its self-aware unfinishedness and openness. "Poe may well anticipate his readers," one critic writes, "insofar as his text, by creating a gap or space into which (let us say) the reader must voyage, makes ironic the very idea of bringing the text to a successful closure, with a correct meaning."⁸ The novel draws attention to the invention of "truth," both through Pym's (often faulty) interpretive moves and by offering endless possibilities to readers who necessarily choose their own "truths" as they interpret the text.

The image of a "gap" or "space" through which the reader voyages and which he or she closes in an individual act of interpretation may grow out of reader-response theory, but it is also

⁷ See Dameron in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, 33. As Dameron notes, Poe's next travel piece after *Pym* was *The Journal of Julius Rodman*, intended to be a twelve-part serialization, only six episodes of which were completed.

⁸ Pahl, 42.

already present in Poe's novel in its fragmented structure and in the images of the ripped note and the chasms.⁹ The chasms in particular are bound up in issues of textual indeterminacy and unstable meaning through the "characters" that may or may not be inscribed upon their walls and through their status as mysterious text inscribed in the landscape. Land and sign are merged, as the land itself becomes a visual sign challenging interpretation. Indeed, the chasms are at the center of the novel's unsettling of representation and knowledge as they combine the geographical mysteries of travel and exploration with problems of interpretation that are not merely about uncertainty and the instability of signs generally, but that are also bound up in the novel's critique of colonial or imperial efforts – in its focus on the process of constructing knowledge about unfamiliar places and peoples, and on the difficulties of relating that unstable "knowledge" to others.

Even those who have made arguments for the structural and symbolic coherence of Poe's sprawling, disjointed text, eliding ruptures through critical interpretations that seek to make the text knowable, can be seen to arrive at the image of the gap or the chasm as a central image, though perhaps unwittingly. Richard Kopley, for example, reads the moment when Too-wit, the native "chief" of the island of Tsalal, stands between two large mirrors in the *Jane Guy*'s cabin as a moment of *mise en abîme*, of endless reflection, mimicking the symmetry of the novel as a whole – a novel which, according to Kopley's structural reading, folds over on itself, ending as it begins and hinging around the point of Augustus's death.¹⁰ Whether or not one accepts such a

⁹ See, for example, Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), especially 280. See also Iser's earlier essay "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction," in *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971): 1-45.

¹⁰ See Kopley, "Introduction," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, xxi. See also David Ketterer, *The Rationale of Deception in Poe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) and

reading, the moment of Too-wit's endless reflection raises a critical theme within the novel – that of the collapse of time and space and of past and future as Too-wit looks infinitely and simultaneously ahead and behind.

At the same time, the notion of *mise en abîme*, of an image of an image or a story of a story, reinforces the instability of language and of signs suggested in the torn note and the etchings in the rock wall. Language and signs are endlessly referential here, never reaching a foundation of “reality.” The bottom always falls out of attempts to reach “truth” as the notion of *mise en abîme* is, significantly, associated with the image of the pit or gap into which Pym and Peters disappear at the moment of the landslide, into which Pym falls, and which ends the novel. While the term does not have a direct English translation, it is frequently described as the idea of placing into infinity or into the abyss, and a translation for the single word *abîme* is “gulf” or “chasm.” Thus, even arguments for recognition of a symmetrical structure within the novel and of a coherent wholeness return to notions of indeterminate meaning reinforced in the idea of the geological gulf.¹¹

Written as a travel narrative, *Pym* hinges on the difficulty of narrating the unfamiliar and of doing so retrospectively, as well as on the disjuncture between what appears to be and what

G.R. Thompson, “The Arabesque Design of *Arthur Gordon Pym*,” in *Poe's Pym* (especially 210) for additional schematizations of *Pym* as folded over on itself, hinged, or symmetrical.

¹¹ In *Pym*, the centrality of the chasm, the abyss, the gap in the landscape and in interpretation would seem to be reinforced by the fact that, much as the chasms' shapes have been argued to suggest the initials eAp, offering a metaliterary reflection on authorship, Pym's initials, AGP, when rearranged, conjure the GAP. Takayuki Tatsumi points out that the initials AGP “can be conceived anagrammatically as ‘gap’” in his unpublished dissertation, *Disfiguration of Genres: A Reading in the Rhetoric of Edgar Allan Poe* (Cornell University, 1987), 91.

For considerations of the image of the “abyss” in Poe's writing in general see, for example, Pahl, *Architects of the Abyss*; J. Gerald Kennedy, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and the Abyss of Interpretation* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). Poe's one-time fiancé Sarah Helen Whitman picked up this imagery a decade after Poe's death when she wrote in her flowery *Edgar Poe and His Critics* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1860), “Edgar Poe came to sound the very depths of the abyss” (65).

is.¹² (“I feared I should not be able to write, from mere memory, a statement so minute and connected as to have the *appearance* of that truth it would really possess” writes Pym in the novel’s Preface.)¹³ This is a focus of each part of the novel, from the description of the mutiny on the *Grampus* and the subsequent disintegration of the ship and the bodies on it, to Pym and Peters’ time on the *Jane Guy*, to their time on the island of Tsalal, so that these “parts” of the narrative are not as separate as they might seem. They are united through the novel’s concerns with fact and fiction, with faulty assumptions based on visual observation (nothing is as it seems: Pym tricks the mutineers by disguising himself as their dead comrade, a ship coming to rescue the *Grampus* turns out to be a ship of death), and with the construction of narrative from fragments of memory as well as from fragments of other texts.

From time to time within the narrative Pym candidly admits that he cannot trust his own perception and that he is relying on his memory to provide certain details, a memory that may be faulty. And though, especially in the second half of the novel, Pym’s stated interest is in pursuing knowledge, in solving great problems, and in opening new sights to science, there persists a sense that “it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain for ever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery,” that “In no affairs of mere prejudice, pro or con, do we deduce inferences with entire certainty even from the most simple data.”¹⁴ This persistent skepticism about Pym’s own ability to understand and accurately report his travels, and to draw conclusions from them, necessitates skepticism regarding the past reports of others.

¹² As Dennis Porter writes, “Nowhere perhaps as much as in the field of travel writing... is the fundamental ambiguity of ‘representation’ more apparent” (*Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 14).

¹³ Poe, *Pym*, 55.

¹⁴ Poe, *Pym*, 126; 65.

Uncertainty about other travel accounts seeps through most explicitly in chapters associated with Pym's time aboard the *Jane Guy* after he and Peters are rescued from what is left of the *Grampus*. These chapters offer digested "histories" of Antarctic exploration as the *Jane Guy* itself heads ever further south. "These islands [the Auroras] are said to have been discovered as early as 1762," Pym offers, leaving this fact open to revision and correction with the skeptical insertion "are said to have been discovered," presenting the detail as a narrative rather than as a fact. Indeed, "a great diversity of opinion has existed" regarding the existence of the islands, according to Pym.¹⁵ And after giving the conclusions of the Royal Geographical Society regarding the position of a large southern tract of land, he asserts, "My own experience will be found to testify most directly to the falsity of the conclusion arrived at by the society."¹⁶ But, of course, the reliability of Pym's experience is also highly questionable by this point in the narrative.

The destabilization of information provided by travel and exploration narratives is furthered through the novel's engagement with actual travel narratives and with scientific, ethnographic, and historical treatises. *Pym* shifts pace and tone abruptly, alternating between vivid, action-filled scenes and the staid language of a log-book or a sailing manual. Poe undoubtedly inserted sections of such texts in his novel to provide verisimilitude, extending the hoax of claiming a truthful narrative through dry, lengthy descriptions of sailing techniques, for example. He probably also hoped to benefit from the contemporary popularity of exploration narratives by mimicking their structure and style. (It is well known that Poe himself took great interest in the governmental expeditions to the Antarctic region being planned as he wrote the

¹⁵ Poe, *Pym*, 156.

¹⁶ Poe, *Pym*, 162.

novel.¹⁷) Yet at the same time he parodies the popularity of such narratives as he crafts a fictional travel tale that reproduces, and exaggerates, the tediousness and lack of cohesion that often characterized contemporary exploration literature.¹⁸

Moreover, such narratives twisted “facts” in order to appeal to a popular readership and were sometimes quite fabricated, but nevertheless taken as truth, a point that *Pym* makes explicit through its blurring of fact and fiction. Benjamin Morrell’s *Narrative of Four Voyages*, a ghostwritten fictionalization of Morrell’s actual travels that served as a source for *Pym*, was, for example, “recommended by the future Secretary of the Navy as essential reading for naval officers” and some historians cited it without qualification throughout the twentieth-century.¹⁹ Though a fictionalization of “truths” themselves probably not understood, the *Narrative* became true. It became history. And even travel narratives that are not overtly fictionalized, *Pym* makes clear, trouble notions of representation and knowledge as meaning shifts in the space of contact. Colonial “knowledge,” *Pym* reminds us, is always unstable.

Pym’s content is not, then, incidental to the themes of textual or semiotic instability, interpretation, and the difficulty or impossibility of “knowing” raised in its enigmatic scenes and images, and in its fragmented form, though few critical readings have emphasized this fact.²⁰ Its themes of exploration and discovery, and the primary sources that it cannibalizes, ground the epistemological questions that it raises about language and representation in the experience of

¹⁷ Poe was influenced by J.N. Reynolds, among others. Reynolds was an advocate for scientific expeditions and, for a short time, a proponent of John Symmes’ theory of a hollow earth with openings at the poles, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Reynolds organized an Antarctic expedition in 1829, but was not part of the Great U.S. Exploring Expedition of 1838-42, though his efforts had, in large part, made that expedition possible.

¹⁸ See, for example, Kennedy, *Narrative*, 32; Gitelman, 349-361; Lyons, 313.

¹⁹ Lyons, 313. See also Gitelman, 352.

²⁰ Notable exceptions include Lyons; Gitelman; and Dana D. Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading “Race” in American Literature, 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

exploration and attempted colonization of peoples and places, and in the histories built upon such moments.

Narrative Collapse

The questions of interpretation and representation that pervade the novel, even during the lengthy descriptions of Pym's time at sea, become most explicit when the narrative reaches the island of Tsalal and Pym becomes a traveler encountering another culture for the first time. This portion of the novel begins with a scene of contact that would have been very familiar to readers of Pacific travel narratives as "four large canoes put off from the shore, filled with men who seemed to be well armed."²¹ The sense of the unfamiliar is mutual here. The native's "jabber" is incomprehensible to the men on the *Jane Guy*, and the Tsalalians had, according to Pym's narrative, "never before seen any of the white race – from whose complexion, indeed, they appeared to recoil. They believed the 'Jane' to be a living creature, and seemed to be afraid of hurting it with the points of their spears." (Pym's sense that this "degree of innocence" may have been "affected" will later seem notably prescient.)²²

When he finally disembarks on the island, Pym finds himself in a land that is explicitly foreign, with bizarre animals, black Tsalalians who are afraid of anything white, and water that is "not colourless" nor "of any one uniform colour," with "distinct veins" that seem to point to the questions of racial difference that pervade this portion of the novel.²³ Some have found the overwhelming black/white imagery of the Tsalal episode to reify racial binaries and to present a

²¹ Poe, *Pym*, 168.

²² Poe, *Pym*, 169.

²³ Poe, *Pym*, 171.

disturbing allegory of the American South.²⁴ But while the black native inhabitants are demonized as they eventually destroy their visitors (and while they may have destroyed earlier visitors considering their intense fear of anything white and the musket that Pym and Peters find in the chasm), those visitors' designs on the island are clear. Though narrated from Pym's point of view, the novel does not necessarily encourage identification or sympathy with Pym over the Tsalalians. Rather, it is carefully constructed to expose Pym's cultural blindness and problematic confidence in his superiority. As Dana Nelson writes, "*Pym* illustrates that the construction of the colonial self is predicated upon the devaluation, the domination and the continuing destruction of the racial other."²⁵ Racial stereotypes in the text can thus be seen to facilitate critiques of white colonial endeavors and "knowledge." Harnessing racial difference to undermine that difference, *Pym*, like other American Oceanic tales such as Melville's *Typee* or "Benito Cereno," blurs the boundaries that structure it.

In Pym's first days on the island Poe continues to reproduce the standard, raced rhetoric of exploration. When Pym and the other men first begin exploring Tsalal it seems to them to be of another time and place entirely and to be ripe for development and "civilizing." At moments, every movement "forward" in space seems to be one away from the present. "At every step we took inland the conviction forced itself upon us that we were in a country differing essentially from any hitherto visited by civilized men," Pym reflects, epitomizing the idea of coming face to face with a distant past that frequently characterizes colonial travel writing and that structured

²⁴ See Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* for an important reading of race in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and for an early critical discussion of how whiteness has positioned itself against blackness in American literature (New York: Vintage Books, 1993): 31-39.

²⁵ Nelson, 108.

narratives of “discovery.”²⁶ Pym reads the natives as naïve savages, their land and resources easily secured by white men, easily brought into the “present” of a global economy. But he does so erroneously. He prefigures Melville’s Amasa Delano in his persistent misinterpretation of the situation before him - a misinterpretation based on assumptions about racial difference. In imagining the natives to be simple, harmless, and of another time, Pym and the other men seal their fates.

After the landslide, which quite literally exposes and jumbles the space of time represented in the geologic record, the falsity of Pym’s interpretation cannot be ignored. Perceived temporal distinctions between a “savage” past and a “civilized” global present collapse as the Tsalalians take control. Significantly, Pym and Peters move through a literal, physical gap in time as they walk through the chasm in which they are trapped. Pym notes, “Upon first descending into the chasm, that is to say, for a hundred feet downward from the summit of the hill, the sides of the abyss bore little resemblance to each other, and, apparently, had at no time been connected, the one surface being of the soapstone and the other of marl, granulated with some metallic matter.”²⁷ The two move through what might be called an “unconformity,” a gap in time in rock strata where layers of rock have been eroded.²⁸ They walk through what is literally a missing span of time in the rock record, signifying the absence of desired linearity.²⁹

²⁶ Poe, *Pym*, 171. See Porter, *Haunted Journeys*, 12. See also, for example, Johannes Fabian’s concept of the “denial of coevalness.” The issue of time is explicitly introduced into this section of the novel through the fictional native word “Klock-Klock” (which Kopley links to Poe’s “A Tale of Jerusalem”). See *Pym*, ed. Kopley, 237, n.1.

²⁷ Poe, *Pym*, 193.

²⁸ Technically, a geologic “unconformity” would refer not to an open chasm but to a rock in which two layers from very different time periods are in contact because the intervening strata have eroded

²⁹ The association of geological features with a sense of deep, “vertical” time dates back at least to Nicolaus Steno’s seventeenth-century realization that each layer of rock embodies a span of time in the past. This discovery revolutionized thinking about geologic timescales in a way that was just beginning to have widespread influence in the early nineteenth century through figures like Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* was published in three volumes between 1830 and 1833, and through the institutionalization of the discipline of geology. On Steno see Alan Cutler, *The Seashell on the*

Perceived cause and effect collapse in this moment. The narrative of progress toward “civilization” that Pym had constructed is shown to be faulty. The natives of Tsalal are very much of the present, and are in control of the future. Nevertheless, Pym struggles to accept this reality. When he encounters the “indentures” on the wall of the chasm, he still refuses to amend his reading and to concede that the natives might possess their own system of representation, their own deep history and traditions. Peters, on the other hand, is willing to treat the marks as characters, indicating an awareness of the agency and histories of other cultures, possibly, within the logic of the novel, because of his own status as an Indian/American “hybrid.”

Having dismissed the “indentures” in the wall of the chasm as a natural phenomenon, Pym is nevertheless disorientated by the challenge they present to the narrative he still needs to believe about the island and its past – a narrative in which his place as “civilized,” as able to render the “indentures” harmless by capturing them in his notebook, is secure. Giving in to the collapse of time and space inherent to the chasms, Pym falls until reaching Peters, who both haunts and saves. As a “dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure” lurking at the bottom of the pit, Peters suggests a repressed reminder of North America’s own violent settler past - one that Pym works to harness and negotiate.

Mountaintop: How Nicolaus Steno Solved an Ancient Mystery and Created a Science of the Earth (New York: Plyme, 2004). On the rise of geology and conceptions of the scale of time see Claude C. Albritton, *The Abyss of Time: Changing Conceptions of the Earth’s Antiquity after the Sixteenth Century* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher; New York: Distributed by St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 146-185.

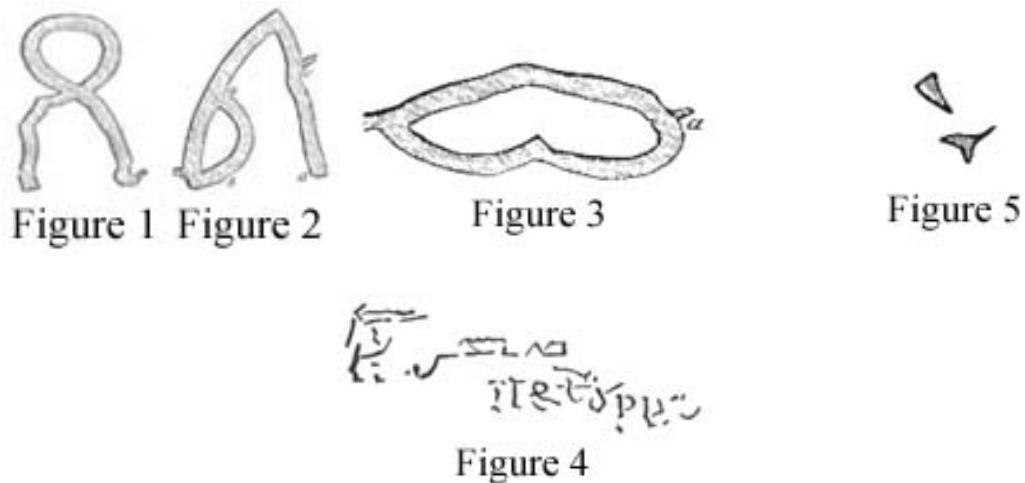


Figure 1.1: Pym's depictions of Tsalal's chasms and "indentures"

Indeed, throughout the novel Peters' identity shifts according to Pym's needs, while also remaining persistently ambiguous and plural. When he is first introduced early in the novel it is as an embodiment of North American contact and settlement: "This man was the son of an Indian woman of the tribe of the Upsarokas, who live among the fastnesses of the Black Hills, near the source of the Missouri. His father was a fur-trader, I believe, or at least connected in some manner with the Indian trading-posts on Lewis river."³⁰ Mention of the Missouri and of the Lewis river suggests the continental explorations of Lewis and Clark, whose narrative Augustus leaves for Pym during his time as a stowaway in the hold of the *Grampus*, linking North American territorial exploration to Pym's desire for Oceanic adventure. Peters, at once a product of North American exploration, contact, and settlement, and an advocate of Pacific roving, always trying to tempt his fellow mutineers with "half-engendered notions of [the] profit and pleasure" to be found among the Pacific islands, himself serves as a perplexing link between

³⁰ Poe, *Pym*, 87.

the two spaces.³¹ Even the description of his origins “among the fastnesses of the Black Hills” echoes the “fastnesses of the hills” and chasms in which he and Pym hide themselves on Tsalal.³²

When he is first introduced Peters is also associated with a grotesque multiplicity. He is physically “deformed”:

short in stature, not more than four feet eight inches high, but his limbs were of Herculean mould...His arms, as well as legs, were *bowed* in the most singular manner...His head was equally deformed, being of immense size, with an indentation on the crown...and entirely bald. To conceal this latter deficiency, which did not proceed from old age, he usually wore a wig formed of any hair-like material which presented itself – occasionally the skin of a Spanish dog or American grizzly bear.³³

Peters is thus described as at once human and animal here. And he is “hybrid” in many senses, his animal covering alternatively Spanish or American. His “countenance” is similarly grotesque, multiply “hybrid,” and raced. His mouth “seemed to be devoid of natural pliancy, so that the ruling expression never varied...To pass this man with a casual glance, one might imagine him to be convulsed with laughter; but a second look would induce a shuddering acknowledgement that, if such an expression were indicative of merriment, the merriment must be that of a demon.”³⁴

The narrative immediately notes that, despite his grotesque appearance, Peters “proved the main instrument in preserving the life of Augustus.”³⁵ Indeed, Peters is the hero in nearly every moment of crisis, and he replaces Augustus as Pym’s sidekick and double after Augustus’ death. It might be tempting to read Peters’ increasing prominence and his shifting relationship to Pym as part of the novel’s paradoxical erasure of difference through difference. (There is, after all, a sense in which Tsalal’s black/white binary serves to invert power differences and thus to

³¹ Poe, *Pym*, 93.

³² Poe, *Pym*, 87; 185.

³³ Poe, *Pym*, 87.

³⁴ Poe, *Pym*, 87. See Mat Johnson’s satiric *Pym: A Novel* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011) for a refreshing engagement with Peters’ hybrid status (23-25).

³⁵ Poe, *Pym*, 87.

challenge the construction of that difference. On Tsalal, “whiteness” is the taboo “Other.”) Peters goes from “being” a bear to saving Pym from an “Arctic bear” encountered before the *Jane Guy*’s arrival at Tsalal. And immediately after the landslide on Tsalal Pym proclaims: “We [Pym and Peters] alone had escaped from the tempest of that overwhelming destruction. We were the only living white men upon the island.”³⁶ In this moment, Pym ignores the fact that Peters is a “half-breed” and aligns the two “white men” against the “brawny,” dark local savages. Here the two are united in their difference from others and in their need to survive, showing difference to be constructed and shifting.

When Pym falls in the chasm Peters’ relationship to him changes again, however. Peters is no longer a fellow “white” man; he is the faithful black/native standing below Pym ready to save the day, at least according to the narration that Pym provides. (Significantly, we are never given access to Peters’ thoughts. As in *Edgar Huntly*, discussed in the next chapter, the Native American/African-American character is denied a voice.) Pym’s troubling encounter with Tsalal’s indigenous peoples, who overthrow the narrative he has constructed in his head – a narrative that is about the ease of appropriating land and resources and about temporal and spatial progress - leads to a free fall that is only stopped by a figure who is momentarily made to represent a knowable narrative from home, temporarily restoring order in this other space of encounter. But Peter’s renewed “hybrid” status as both a savior and a “dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure” indicates the persistent rupturing of historical repression through the surface of stories told of the past. His presence both stops Pym’s fall into historiographical uncertainty that challenges a clear narrative of progress from “savage” to “civilized,” uncharted to charted, pre-

³⁶ Poe, *Pym*, 185.

modern to modern, global, and industrial, and his presence haunts with reminders of North America's own unsettled status.³⁷

Writing (on) Space

In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, the unstable relations of North American settlement are, then, enacted in a global space, a space that is notably anywhere and nowhere. The relationship between Pym and Peters is at once specific. Pym is a son of New England associated with the profits of global trade. His father is “a respectable trader in sea-stores,” his “maternal grandfather...an attorney in good practice” whose profits from bank speculation Pym stands to inherit.³⁸ Peters is a frontier “hybrid.” And at the same time their relationship is more general as Pym's attitude toward Peters as “half-breed,” as different, echoes his initial assumptions about the Tsalalians. Pym's shifting attitude toward Peters highlights the assumptions that construct narratives of encounter, possession of land, and settlement, illustrating an unsettled logic of relationality to people and place. In this other space of the island, in the space of the chasms that are at once text in the landscape and inscrutable, Pym and Peters are simultaneously “white” countrymen, and they are different, just as settler hopes of “assimilating” indigenous peoples are never realized, just as the Euro-American settler claims indigeneity that is simultaneously never indigeneity.

While it has been tempting to read Tsalal as an allegory of the United States (particularly of the racial divisions and plantation system of the American South), and while connections between Peters and the Pacific, between the “fastnesses of the Black Hills” and the “fastnesses”

³⁷ See John Carlos Rowe, “Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism,” in *Poe's Pym*, 131-32. See Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2000) for discussion of the haunting specter of the Indian in American literature.

³⁸ Poe, *Pym*, 57.

of Tsalal's hills might seem to reinforce this sense of allegory, these resonances need not be read as directly allegorical in order to matter. The geographical space of Tsalal is not the geographical space of the United States. Rather, the power of such resonances stems from a more general engagement with a global project of exploration and potential settlement in which the United States was participating at the time, and from the simultaneous fact of persistent tensions surrounding colonial settlement in North America. In the course of mimicking and reproducing the rhetoric of narratives of travel and discovery and the unstable, polyvocal histories built upon those narratives, *Pym* condenses the processes of discovery, possession, and of settlement in a way that simultaneously speaks to the global as it intersects with the domestic.

This is especially true as the novel recounts histories of previous colonial endeavors prior to the *Jane Guy*'s arrival at Tsalal. Here we get not only accounts of "discovery," of taking "possession" of islands at extreme southern latitudes, and of men who temporarily reside on the islands to help "prepare sealskins and oil," but also of attempts at more permanent settlements. We read of "Jonathan Lambert," an American who "called himself the sovereign" of an island dubbed "Tristan," who "had cleared and cultivated about sixty acres of land and [then] turned his attention to raising the coffee-plant and sugar-cane, with which he had been furnished by the American minister at Rio Janeiro."³⁹ We read of "Captain Colquhoun, of the American brig 'Betsey'" who "planted onions, potatoes, cabbages, and a great many other vegetables" on a particular island.⁴⁰ We read of settlements failing and of new "sovereigns" establishing themselves, of populations growing from twenty-four to fifty-six persons in short periods of time and expanding their settlements to neighboring islands so that these narratives of travel and

³⁹ Poe, *Pym*, 155-56.

⁴⁰ Poe, *Pym*, 155.

discovery also become narratives of those who try to stay, to claim sovereignty, and to “domesticate” the land.

When the *Jane Guy*’s crew establishes a “regular market” on the shore of Tsalal and begins to fell trees, clearing the ground for buildings in which they can cure *bêche de mer* for export, then, the reader has been prepared to view this not only as a temporary outpost, but as a potential (British) settlement. Tsalal is already being “improved” in typical colonial settler fashion. Its evocation of a South Pacific island suggests the romanticized “notions of profit and pleasure” associated with the region in the early nineteenth century as sealers and whalers began to frequent islands like New Zealand, as permanent European settlements were established in such places, and as narratives about those places were circulated. (Again, Peters “dwelt on the world of novelty and amusement to be found among the innumerable islands of the Pacific, on the perfect security and freedom from all restraint to be enjoyed, but, more particularly, on the deliciousness of the climate, on the abundant means of good living, and on the voluptuous beauty of the women.”)⁴¹ But Tsalal’s association with the Antarctic simultaneously suggests a connection to a space that is increasingly being recognized as a kind of test case for questions surrounding discovery, territorial claims, and settlement in part because, unlike Tsalal, Antarctica turned out to be “empty.”

The function of the Antarctic in *Pym* is undoubtedly its status as unknown and mysterious. Although there had been speculation about a southern continent for centuries, Antarctica had only been sighted less than two decades before Poe wrote the novel, and it would be another year before the United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-42 “discovered” the continent. It would be another three years before Ross sailed through the sea and along the ice that now bears his name. The “Great Southern Continent” remained very much a space of

⁴¹ Poe, *Pym*, 93.

imagination, making it an ideal setting for a novel concerned with the unstable nature of exploration and “discovery” narratives.

Although Poe had no way of knowing it, the problems of attempted spatial appropriation through mapping and narration conjured by the Gothic images of Tsalal’s chasms would be played out across the terrain of the “Great White” southern continent. Until recently, little attention has been paid to the colonial settler history of Antarctica, but its “blank” space would quite literally be written upon and divided into pie-shaped portions by various “sovereigns.” As such, it has recently been argued, “Antarctica offers a truly unique perspective on the colonial settler project.”⁴² Despite the fact that no one was displaced by “settlement” and that no one lives there permanently, and despite the fact that the Antarctic interior has not yielded the valuable minerals that explorers once hoped to find, claims to the space have reproduced various forms of the raced and gendered rhetoric of settler colonialism, as well as the settler rhetoric of conquering nature and appropriating and “improving” space. Indeed, as one scholar claims, “the Antarctic context...produced an ideal form of settler colonialism based purely on space”; “an appropriation of space in which representation mattered far more than reality.”⁴³ In the early twentieth century, seven countries made claims on parts of Antarctic space. Those claims of sovereignty, founded in part on claims of discovery and exploration, were only suspended, not erased, by the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, so that a narrative of cooperation and common stewardship has merely masked the persistent imperial situation of Antarctic space.⁴⁴ Indeed, some countries now have bases on other country’s territorial claims, producing an unsteady,

⁴² Adrian Howkins, “Appropriating Space: Antarctic Imperialism and the Mentality of Settler Colonialism,” *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, eds. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edwards (Houndsmills, Baingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 31.

⁴³ Howkins, 48; 40.

⁴⁴ See Howkins, 48.

layered co-existence and sense of belonging. In 1838, however, the Southern Continent remained unclaimed according to the logic of Euro-American settlement and so it provided an ideal setting in which to probe, and to critique, what is essential to colonial settlement: a sense of space to be appropriated, and of narrative to be constructed about that space and its past. The history of Antarctic space since the publication of Poe's novel has reinforced the instability of narratives of possession and belonging raised in *Pym*. Narratives of Antarctic space are always unfinished, troubling ideas of nationalism and sovereignty central to settler culture.

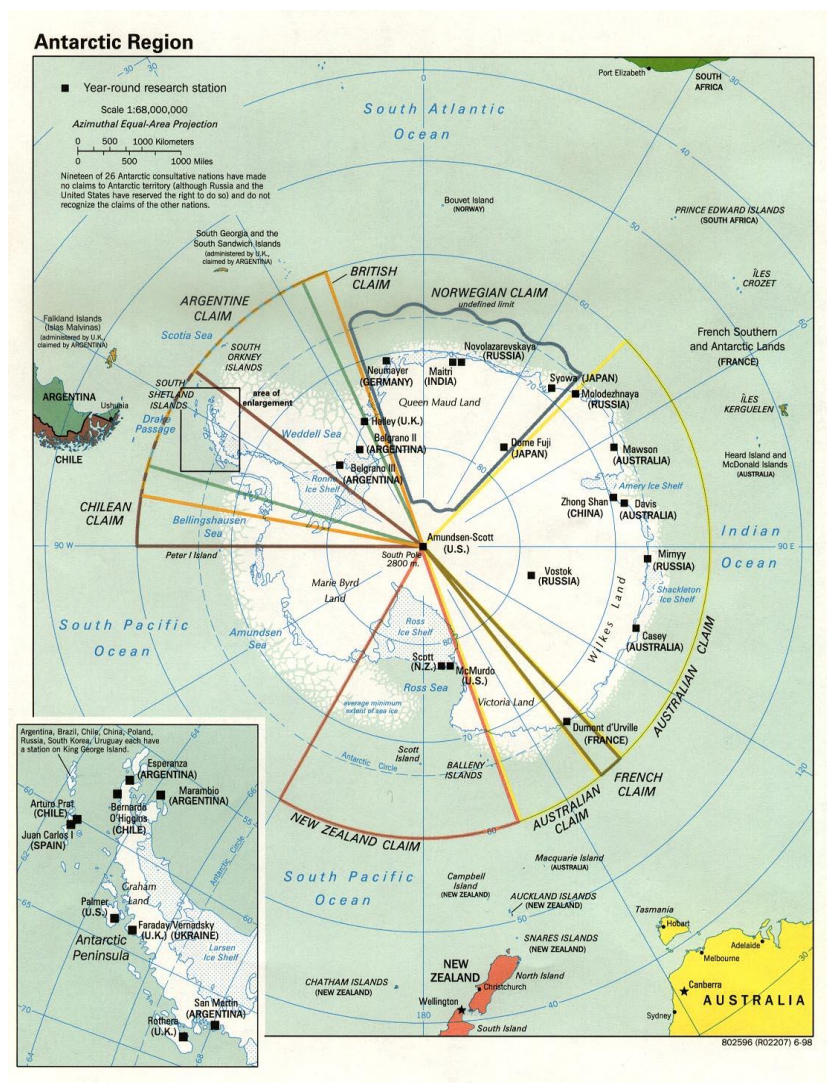


Figure 1.2: Modern Map of Antarctic Territorial Claims

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/ref_maps/pdf/antarctic.pdf

If polar space is still, to some extent, an imagined space, it was a fantastic imagined space in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the speculative science fiction tale *Symzonia* (1820), based on John Symmes' hollow earth theory, was among the sources that Poe drew on in writing *Pym*. In 1818 Symmes published a pamphlet, distributed to colleges and universities across the United States, in which he declared that "the earth is hollow, and habitable within."⁴⁵ He posited that temperatures actually grew warmer as one passed through the "icy hoop" and approached the poles, until reaching a chasm providing access to the center of the earth. *Symzonia*, published under the pseudonym Captain Adam Seaborn and sometimes (no doubt inaccurately) attributed to Symmes himself, purports to be the true tale of an expedition into the earth through the southern polar hole.⁴⁶ Inside the earth Seaborn and his crew find a utopian civilization where contentment rather than constant striving is the norm, where the United States' capitalist and expansionist impulses are seen as great evils.

⁴⁵ John Cleves Symmes, "Light Gives Light, to Light Discover – 'Ad Infinitum'" (mailer, St. Louis, 1818).

⁴⁶ *Symzonia*'s satiric tone makes it clear that Symmes himself did not write the book. A case has been made for Nathaniel Ames as author of the work. See Hans-Joachim Land and Benjamin Lease, "The Authorship of *Symzonia*: The Case for Nathaniel Ames," *New England Quarterly* 48 (1975): 241-52.

SECTIONAL VIEW OF THE EARTH.

SHOWING THE
OPENINGS AT THE POLES.

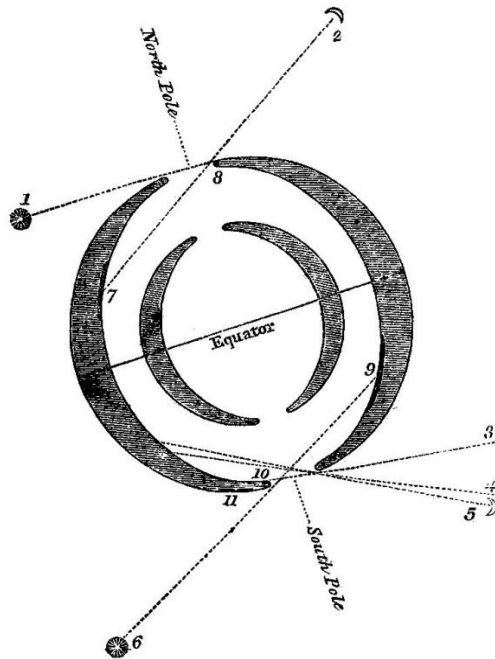


Figure 1.3: Sectional View of the Earth Showing the Openings at the Poles, frontispiece to *Symzonia*

Published the year after the United States' major financial crisis of 1819, *Symzonia's* critique of financial overreaching is clear. Taxes and debt are a major preoccupation of the end of the novel. The book also emphasizes the irony of needing to pay debts incurred in exploring a utopia of plenty and of contentment in order to acquire more money to return to that utopia. Published in the year of the Missouri Compromise, which regulated slavery in new territories of the United States as the geographical and narrative boundaries of statehood extended westward, the novel is also a satire of territorial expansion. In newly "discovered" southern lands Captain Seaborn's expedition digs up enormous bones, decides that they are "mammoth bones of

course,” loads them onto their ship, and then names a nearby river Mammoth River.⁴⁷ Calling upon the “right of discovery and occupancy, according to the usages of Christian nations” they devote “a day to the performance of a necessary duty to [their] country, namely, taking possession of the country [they] had discovered, in the name and on behalf of the people of the United States of America.”⁴⁸ Seaborn draws up a manifesto attesting to his discovery of the southern continent and has “it engraved on a plate of sheathing copper, with a spread eagle at the top, and at the bottom a bank, with 100 dollar bills tumbling out of the doors and windows, to denote the amazing quantity and solidity of the wealth of [his] country.”⁴⁹ He and the crew stage a procession, bury the copper plate, erect a liberty pole displaying “the standard of the United States,” and then Seaborn orders “a salute to be fired of one gun for every state.” There is confusion about how many states there are, however. They are being added so rapidly that no one is sure. Someone suggests the number twenty-one, but Seaborn objects “to that number, as being the royal salute of Great-Britain, and settle[s] the matter by telling them to fire away till they were tired of it, and finish off with a few squibs for the half-made States.”⁵⁰

Here Seaborn seems to want to distance his expedition’s claims from British imperial actions, working to distinguish the U.S. from the tyrannical power against which the American colonies had revolted and, paradoxically, he also seems to want to outdo Great Britain as he reproduces imperial actions in the name of the United States. At the same time this moment draws attention to expansion at home through mention of an unknown number of formed and “half-made States.” Indeed, in *Symzonia* journeying into the center of the earth in special, retrofitted steamships is consistently associated with the “amphibious” in a way that conjures the

⁴⁷ *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1820; 1965), 69, 70.

⁴⁸ *Symzonia*, 74, 73.

⁴⁹ *Symzonia*, 74.

⁵⁰ *Symzonia*, 75.

watery movement over land of commercial steamships beginning to move through the arteries and newly built canals of the United States so that, as in *Pym*, connections between global and domestic spaces and economies are apparent.⁵¹

As Gretchen Murphy has pointed out, however, the vision of U.S. continental expansion that became associated with the term Manifest Destiny and a vision of global empire were not necessarily “part of the same powerful governing ideology” in this era.⁵² In the early nineteenth century, debates raged about how to reconcile “U.S. global expansion” with “a national identity grounded in myths of anti-imperialism and global isolation” – an identity that was also very much grounded in domestic development.⁵³ Expansion at home was one thing. Moving into other spaces was quite another. As Murphy shows, these debates were at the heart of plans for Antarctic exploration that grew, in part, out of Symmes’ theories and that were part of Poe’s inspiration for *Pym*. Individuals like Jeremiah Reynolds, who sought to carry Symmes’ vision for polar exploration forward, were faced with the rhetorical challenge of showing that “colonial maritime enterprise and westward expansion...pushing outward by sea and by land should not viewed not in opposition but as part of the same project.”⁵⁴

Symzonia, like *Pym*, expresses ambivalence about both projects. Although, as Murphy argues, *Symzonia* can be read as “ultimately justif[ying] ‘discovery’ as an act of modern agency transgressing the limits of current knowledge,” the novel does not end with transgression of knowledge or space.⁵⁵ It ends with an image of confinement as Seaborn waits for his narrative to provide him with enough money to escape his debts and return to his explorations. It ends with

⁵¹ For a general history of the steamboat and its role in “opening” the American West see James Thomas Flexner, *Steamboats Come True: American Inventors in Action* (New York: The Viking Press, 1944).

⁵² Gretchen Murphy, “*Symzonia*, *Typee*, and the Dream of U.S. Global Isolation,” *ESQ*, Vol. 49, 2003, 250.

⁵³ Murphy, 254.

⁵⁴ Murphy, 258.

⁵⁵ Murphy, 266.

him sitting “in the garret of a lofty house, where, it being about the middle of dog-days, the sun exerts its utmost power upon the roof, within eighteen inches of [his] head.”⁵⁶ This description, with its attention to the position of the sun, almost suggests that Seaborn is inside the earth since the novel is filled with details about the sun’s position relative to the polar holes at certain times of the year. But whether he is inside of the earth or in a hot garret, he is trapped in a cycle of accumulation and loss. At the end of the novel Seaborn is left without his polar specimens and original manuscripts (lost on the return voyage). He is left writing his account from memory in order to raise money to satisfy his need to venture out again. The novel’s conclusion plunges the reader back into its middle, leading the reader to imagine everything beginning again with a new voyage of “discovery” that will inevitably itself be incomplete. Where, the novel seems to ask, do territorial ambitions end? Where do narratives of such ambitions end? Leaving the reader with Seaborn, in a garret that is also somehow a hole in the bottom of the earth, *Symzonia* suggests an endless cycle of travel and histories of travel that can never be satisfactorily completed. It is unclear where Seaborn’s discovery has left us.

Refusing to Fill the “Vacuum”

Just as *Symzonia* leaves the reader moving between internal and external worlds, or simultaneously in a garret and in the center of the earth, so too does *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* leave its reader repeatedly plunging back into its depths. *Pym* refuses any fixity, ending with Pym and Peters’ journey to the edge of an abyss dominated by a human figure “of the perfect whiteness of the snow.” This ending is one of the sections of the text written in the form of a chronicle of events rather than an explanatory narrative. The work of interpretation remains to be performed on the text, this fragmented format reminds the reader. The “history” of

⁵⁶ *Symzonia*, 248.

the journey is still in its rough form, a point reinforced through the information (provided in the “Note” appended to the text) that the “few remaining chapters which were to have completed [Pym’s] narrative” have been lost, so that the narrative is, in a very real sense, unfinished.⁵⁷

That “Note” also highlights the unfinished interpretative work of historicizing and narrating by trying to “finish” the narrative in three short pages, filling in gaps in interpretation with explanations of the meaning embedded in the shapes of the chasms and in the “Ethiopian characters so mysteriously written in their windings.”⁵⁸ A fictional editor performs this work. Significantly, Poe himself, “the gentleman whose name is mentioned in the preface, and who, from the statement there made, might be supposed able to fill the vacuum,” refuses to fill the void “for satisfactory reasons connected with the general inaccuracy of the details afforded him, and his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narration.”⁵⁹ This refusal highlights the indeterminacy of narratives of others’ experiences and of the past, and the dangers of filling the “vacuum” without adequate attention to truth and to probability.

The novel finally ends with the fictional editor’s tone of ethnographic, archeological authority as he glosses over the fact that Tsalal presumably remains unclaimed by Euro-American powers, and Pym’s story a mystery. But this is still an ending that is not an ending, as the reader remains teetering over the abyss with Pym and Peters, wondering about the conclusion of their journey and as, more specifically, the final note repeatedly leads the reader back into the chasms. As John Irwin points out, the note returns the reader’s attention to the chasms and its figures, referring to specific pages within the text: “The closing note curves the narrative line back into itself...[it] returns the reader to the chasm episode, presumably to retrace the narrative line to the final break in the text, and then on to the note which sends him [sic] back to the chasm

⁵⁷ Poe, *Pym*, 207.

⁵⁸ Poe, *Pym*, 208.

⁵⁹ Poe, *Pym* 207.

episode, and so on.”⁶⁰ The novel’s structure of serialization - its episodic format - is one of repetition rather than of linear movement forward toward a conclusive ending, despite the fictional editor’s final interpretive work. In harnessing the travel narrative to spatialize a story of contact in which Pym arrives in an unfamiliar land seemingly out of space and time, in spatializing the indeterminacy of meaning in that contact situation, in part through the geological chasms and their “indentures,” in spatializing the openness of the record, the “vacuum,” that Poe as a fictional character refuses to complete, *Pym* destabilizes the historical narration of contact and settlement in a way that is reinforced by the novel’s fragmented form – its repetition that is both spatial and narrative.

Ultimately, *Pym* brings its reader not only back into the indeterminacy of the chasms and their association with writing history, but also (briefly and suggestively) back into the interior of the United States. Though Pym is dead, Peters, we are told in the final note, “is still alive, and a resident of Illinois, but cannot be met with at present.”⁶¹ The travel that has taken us to the fantastic far reaches of the globe ends in the unfixed space of the North American interior. Illinois was not one of *Symzonia*’s “half-made States” when *Pym* was published; its borders had been fixed and its status as a sovereign state established in 1818 (while Symmes was circulating his pamphlet). But Illinois was, of course, still unsettled as well. The Black Hawk War, discussed in the third chapter, had occurred only a few years earlier, “clearing” the land so that settlement could proceed. And in the late 1830s as Poe wrote *Pym* the question of slavery was being hotly contested in Illinois. Slavery existed within the state, especially in its southern regions, though efforts to make it officially permissible had failed. In 1837, as Poe wrote *Pym*,

⁶⁰ Irwin, 197.

⁶¹ Poe, *Pym*, 207.

abolitionist newspaper editor Elijah Lovejoy was killed by a mob in Alton, Illinois when the mob attacked the warehouse where he ran his printing press. By that point, Lovejoy's press had already been destroyed three times – his own ability to complete a narrative in print repeatedly compromised.⁶²

Leaving Peters in Illinois rather than returning him to the Black Hills or the source of the Missouri River places him in a geographic space where narratives about how settlement would proceed into other Western spaces were being (violently) debated. This hint of Peters' unknown afterlife suggests unstable narratives of race and space implied by Pym's fall in Tsalal's chasms. Unable to complete the narrative of discovery, colonization, and settlement that he has imagined for the space of Tsalal, Pym falls back on Peters (variously coded as half-white, half-Indian, and as black), but Peters himself serves as a reminder of incomplete(able) narratives of belonging at the heart of U.S. settler space.⁶³

If *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is, as J. Gerald Kennedy has suggested, about “the arbitrary, improvisational nature of interpretation, which creates the effect of knowledge or insight largely by suppressing contrary evidence or interpretive uncertainty and by asserting an authority rooted in its own posterior status” this commentary on interpretation is not only

⁶² See Edward Beecher, *Narrative of Riots at Alton: In Connection with the Death of Elijah P. Lovejoy* (Alton, IL: George Holton, 1838) for a contemporary reflection on these events.

⁶³ Indeed, Poe's hint at Peters' afterlife has inspired other authors to take up his story. In 1899 Charles Romeyn Dake published the novel *A Strange Discovery* (New York: H.I. Kimball), in which a doctor recounts the story that his patient, Peters, told him about his mysterious Antarctic journey. More recently, Mat Johnson's *Pym: A Novel* imagines that an (African-American) Professor of American Literature who has been denied tenure discovers a long-lost manuscript written by Peters and journeys to Antarctica with an all black crew in search of Tsalal. Johnson's novel imagines Peters as African-American himself, pointing to tensions surrounding race and identity that were at the heart of American politics during Poe's time, and providing biting commentaries on present day concerns.

abstract and general.⁶⁴ It is grounded in the context of claims to knowledge in a present moment of exploration, attempted colonization, and potential settlement, and in the historical knowledge built upon fraught colonial discourses that become colonial settler discourses. It is grounded in the narrative of progress embedded in Pym's desire for adventure and his desire to "discover," document, and colonize distant lands. The disjuncture between sign and meaning in *Pym* concerns the play of history built upon tales of encounter and the accumulation of interpretive moves that attempt give the semblance of fixity to the past, denying that play. Moving through distant island spaces before arriving back in the North American interior, *Pym* positions this historical narrative instability in a global space of exploration, linking the disjunctures of narratives of travel and encounter to the disjunctures of the historical narratives of "progress" that they often sought to support.

Poe was certainly not the first to draw upon the rhetoric of travel or on spatial imagery to destabilize the historical constructions of colonial and settler colonial spaces, however. As I discuss in the next chapter, Charles Brockden Brown, writing at a time when the travels of early modern explorers were often harnessed to provide foundations for epic histories of the Americas, crafted a novel in which movement through topographical spaces, like *Pym*'s chasms, shows that those spaces fail to serve as the "rooms" of knowledge that they might at first suggest.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, *Narrative*, 78-79.

Chapter Two: *Edgar Huntly, History, and the Epistemological Crisis of the Travel Narrative*

In 1787, at the age of sixteen, the future novelist Charles Brockden Brown had already “sketched the plan of three distinct epic poems, one on the discovery of America, another on Pizarro’s expedition against Peru, and a third on Cortez’s expedition to America. With these he was much engrossed, and for a long time he thought life was only desirable to accomplish them.”¹ Brown’s desire to write epic long poems was probably informed by similar literary projects that emerged in the years after the Revolution. Joel Barlow’s *Vision of Columbus*, for example, was published that same year and would be republished in a revised form as *The Columbiad* in 1807. Barlow and other writers like Philip Freneau worked to fit the United States’ revolutionary triumph into a broader history of the Americas. As a review of *The Columbiad* put it, the poem’s ten books describe “the discovery and settlement of a new world; the wars, revolutions, arts, industry, commerce, with the vast extensions of science and the means of happiness, which arise from unfolding the two hemispheres of our earth to the view of each other.”² Appropriating and re-imagining foundational moments of discovery and conquest

¹ Paul Allen, *The Late Charles Brockden Brown*, Robert E. Hemenway and Joseph Katz, eds. (Columbia, S.C.: J. Faust & Co., Publishers, 1976), 11. Paul Allen’s unfinished biography of Brown is, significantly, the only place where this information appears. Allen was commissioned to write Brown’s official biography in 1811, one year after the author’s death. Allen never completed the project, and the volume that he did write was integrated into William Dunlop’s *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, published in 1815. The proof copy of Allen’s volume was rediscovered only in the mid-twentieth century. Brown’s own biography is, then, a study in the negotiation of historical incompleteness and fragmentation discussed in this chapter. To begin with this detail is to quite self-consciously begin with an unconfirmable narrative.

² *The Columbiad*, anonymous review (sometimes attributed to Brown, though this attribution seems unsupported), *The American Register; or, General Repository of History, Politics and Science*, Jan 1, 1807, 217.

as the young republic ratified a constitution and as territorial expansion progressed, Barlow and others crafted histories that worked to make the United States heir to Columbus' "vision."³

It is not surprising then that the young Brown may have contemplated penning such poems himself. If he did, those early literary efforts have not survived. Instead, Brown is now best known for a very different kind of narrative; he is known for disorienting Gothic tales in which somnambulists wander the wilderness, in which characters navigate the empty streets of a city during a yellow fever epidemic, rather than for florid epic visions. Brown's journeys into Gothic landscapes – urban and rural – nevertheless engage with issues of travel, empire, and history bound up in a figure like Columbus, though they challenge any ideas of historical and territorial progress embedded within a work like Barlow's.

Indeed, all four of Brown's best-known novels engage with travel and encounter - and consequently with issues of representation and knowledge - but perhaps none more so than *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (published in 1799 but set in 1787). *Edgar Huntly's* inexplicable events and fragmented form reflect back on a long tradition of writing in and about experiences in the "New World," connecting the physical ruptures of travel and exploration to

³ Barlow's poems also work to make the United States heir to the empires of indigenous America. As Eric Wertheimer points out in *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Barlow attempts to stamp "a national identity by negotiating the past of Indian America" (87). Both Columbus and the Incan empire (specifically its mythic founder Manco Capac) become "seemingly apt projections of American notions of imperial republicanism, facilitat[ing] the entry of the American republic into global history and its corresponding ambitions" (73). In this sense, Barlow's poems are less monolithically "settled" than they might initially seem as they appropriate indigenous pasts rather than ignoring them completely.

As Wertheimer also makes clear, Barlow's two poems reflect many of the changes that occurred between their dates of publication. The later poem is more confidently national in focus and also questions some of the sources of *Vision of Columbus*. Barlow acknowledges the "middle space between fable and history" in one of his original sources (though notably not in his own work), capturing the spatializing of historiographic processes central to this project (see Wertheimer, 76-77). See Kamrath, *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown*, 16 and 180 for a reading of Barlow's vision as providential and exceptional in opposition to what Kamrath sees as Brown's radical questioning. See Steven Blakemore, *Joel Barlow's Columbiad: A Bicentennial Reading* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007) for a book-length reading of the poem. Philip Freneau's "The Rising Glory of America" (two versions: 1771 and 1786) provides another example of such contemporary imperial poems.

the negotiation of epistemological ruptures in the process of narrating a colonial present that becomes a settler colonial past. The novel reflects on the unstable process of creating settler colonial “knowledge.” Highlighting troubled moments of interpretation or elided gaps in understanding that surround experiences of travel and encounter, moments that appear frequently in the records and journals of explorers like Columbus, *Edgar Huntly* illustrates that narrating travel and claiming land both require navigating territorial and conceptual lacunae.

Brown has become a key figure in early American literature in recent decades because his novels challenge notions of republican unity, enacting anxieties about authority and control in the early republic. His political and social writings have also provided insight into numerous contemporary debates, ranging from the acquisition of new territories to women’s rights. At the same time, his historical and historiographical writings have increasingly been recognized to engage fundamental questions about narration and history that complicate notions of historiographical unity in the young republic. If Brown’s writings express an unstable present, they also express an awareness of the instability of narratives about the past.

Brown probes the nature of historical narrative in numerous essays and in reviews of books on historical subjects, showing that history, like fiction, is constructed, and that we can, as Brown himself writes, “only make approaches to the truth.”⁴ His acknowledgement that “Useful

⁴ Charles Brockden Brown, “Walstein’s School of History,” *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (Aug 1799, Vol. 1, Iss. 5), 336. Some of Brown’s other reflections on history include: “Parallel between Hume, Robertson and Gibbon,” *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (May 1799, Vol. 1, Iss. 2): 90-94 and “The Difference between History and Romance,” *The Monthly Magazine and American Review* (April 1800, Vol. 2, Iss. 4): 251-253. Some of the historical essays appearing in periodicals with which Brown was in some way affiliated have been incorrectly attributed to Brown. (This has been true, for example, of Isaac D’Israeli’s “Historical Characters are False Representations of Nature,” *The Literary Magazine, and American Register* (February 1806, Vol. 5, Iss. 29): 32-36.) I follow the attributions offered in the most recent and comprehensive treatment of Brown’s historical writings, Mark Kamrath’s *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown: Radical History and the Early*

narratives must comprise facts linked together by some other circumstance,” that “They must, commonly, consist of events, for a knowledge of which the narrator is indebted to the evidence of others,” and that “This evidence, though accompanied with different degrees of probability, can never give birth to certainty,” sounds much like the historical relativism and meta-historical awareness that has emerged from a variety of late-twentieth-century theoretical “posts.”⁵

For example, Brown draws a distinction between the historian and the romancer that might be seen as akin to that drawn between the annalist and the historian in Hayden White’s work.⁶ Brown’s historian and White’s annalist note and arrange observations, but do not draw connections between those observations. They do not narrate. Brown’s romancer and White’s historian posit relationships between cause and effect using “imagination” to bridge gaps in knowledge and to tell a story of what happened in the past. Of course, gathering and arranging observations is an important prelude to describing the relationship between observations and, as such, according to Brown, “The same man is frequently both historian and romancer in the compass of the same work.”⁷ Indeed, “the writer...who does not blend the two characters, is essentially defective.”⁸ Brown does not, then, express anything like complete historical relativism. But an awareness of the constructed nature of historical narrative pervades his

Republic. As Kamrath points out, the fact that Brown chose to include essays like D’Israeli’s in periodicals for which he made editorial decisions is indicative of his evolving reflections on history (92).

⁵ Brown, “The Difference Between History and Romance,” 253. Among these “posts” are, of course, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. Kamrath has developed this connection in *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown* and in his earlier essay “Charles Brockden Brown and the ‘Art of the Historian’: An Essay Concerning (Post) Modern Historical Understanding,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Summer 2001), in which he explores how Brown specifically, and late eighteenth-century historians more generally, “grappled with issues concerning historical representation and truth and how such inquiries correspond with our own” (232).

⁶ See Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): 1-25, a title that seems to leap back across the centuries to Brown’s concerns.

⁷ Brown, “The Difference between History and Romance,” 252.

⁸ Brown, “The Difference between History and Romance,” 253.

writings on history as he urges impartiality and awareness of potential ideological bias in narration of the past.

Brown's questioning of truth claims, representation, and of the power of narrative may have begun relatively early in his life as he joined in debate and discussion with the Belles Lettres Club in Philadelphia beginning in 1786 or 1787, around the same time that he professed a desire to pen epic poems on the discovery and exploration of America. His thoughts about these issues would almost certainly have been influenced by his later participation in New York's Friendly Club, whose members had lively discussions about schools of thought like Godwinian rationalism. In opposition to a world organized in terms of Lockean contracts and ideas of natural rights, William Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793) envisioned a society grounded in pure philosophy and science, privileging individual conscience and private judgment above all else – especially above the institutions of “coercion” designed by humans. The ideas of reason and utility, and the questioning of the status quo that Brown would have engaged with while reading and discussing Godwin (and that would have already been part of his Quaker heritage, as Peter Kafer points out) may have contributed to his later reflections on the crafting of historical narrative.⁹

The degree to which historians writing during these years were attentive to issues of bias and interpretation in the crafting of histories remains open to question. We often think of such early national histories as being uncritically celebratory and depicting a uniformly providential view of American, or at least of New England and Middle Atlantic, history. Mark Kamrath

⁹ For a helpful history of Godwinian thought and of Brown's engagement with it see Peter Kafer, *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 66-104. For a complicating view of Brown's association with radicalism, and with Godwinian radicalism in particular, see Verhoeven, “This blissful period of intellectual liberty”: Transatlantic Radicalism and Enlightened Conservatism in Brown's Early Writings,” in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, Barnard, Kamrath, and Shapiro, eds. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 7-40.

concludes, “most colonial and early national historians were...minimally self-conscious about the fictive aspects of history writing, although state and national historians such as Thomas Prince, Jeremy Belknap, Abiel Holmes, and Mercy Otis Warren variously acknowledged their attempts at impartiality or admitted the impossibility of rendering history with objectivity.”¹⁰ Edwin Larkin notes: “American historians of the early national era, such as David Ramsay, Mercy Otis Warren, and John Marshall, did not set out merely to record the events of the Revolution. They well understood their role in developing an understanding of the recent upheaval and shaping the nation’s sense of self. To them, writing a history became an opportunity to interpret, a chance to represent and legitimate a particular view of the causes and lessons of the Revolution.”¹¹

If some early national historians were more self-aware than is usually acknowledged, Brown’s writings show him to have encountered questions of perspective, interpretation, and subjectivity head-on. If most of these historians, despite their self-awareness, wrote some version of the progressive historical narratives that we now associate with efforts to frame an early national identity (progressive narratives growing out of the exceptionalism and confidence in the civilizing mission asserted in the narratives of many early explorers), Brown’s writings question those narratives. For Brown, like his intellectual interlocutor Godwin whose 1797 essay “Of History and Romance” discussed history as able to provide only outlines, while romance fleshes out those outlines, historical narratives are not to be taken as given truths or as monolithic stories of what “really happened.”¹² They are constructed out of a need to forge

¹⁰ Kamrath, “Charles Brockden Brown and the ‘Art of the Historian’,” 237.

¹¹ Edward Larkin, “Seeing through Language: Narrative, Portraiture, and Character in Peter Oliver’s *The Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion*,” *Early American Literature* 36 (2001), 427.

¹²“It must be admitted indeed that all history bears too near a resemblance to fable. Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts. If this be the case in courts of justice, where truth is sometimes sifted with tenacious perseverance, how much more will it hold true

coherence – a need to narrate and to aspire to truth. This late eighteenth-century awareness that, as White would write nearly two centuries later, the “value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary,” indicates a disruption in the dominant narrative that has been constructed to chart thinking about historical narrative itself.¹³ Reconsidering the linear tale often told of American historiography – that of a shift from monolithic eighteenth and nineteenth-century histories to the fragmented, unstable narratives of a post-modern era – requires engaging with how Brown’s writings unsettle dominant ideas about historical knowledge in the early republic in a way that is inextricable from an unsettled stance toward foundational myths of discovery, encounter, and territorial settlement.

As in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Edgar Huntly’s travels locate the settler subject and problems of unsettled knowledge within an unsettled landscape, yoking the challenge of crafting coherent narratives with the challenge of taming space. Indeed, this is a connection that appears elsewhere in Brown’s writing. His essays on history frequently use spatial metaphors to describe the construction of historical knowledge. These metaphors – whether of

of the historian? He can administer no oath, he cannot issue his precept, and summon his witnesses from distant provinces, he cannot arraign his personages and compel them to put in their answer. He must take what they choose to tell, the broken fragments, and the scattered ruins of evidence. That history which comes nearest to truth, is the mere chronicle of facts, places and dates. But this is in reality no history...The reader will be miserably deluded if, while he reads history, he suffers himself to imagine that he is reading facts...Philosophers, we are told, have been accustomed by old prescription to blunder in the dark; but there is perhaps no darkness, if we consider the case maturely, so complete as that of the historian...If you be a superficial thinker, you will take up with one or another of their [historians] representations, as best suits your prejudices. But, if you are a profound one, you will see so many incongruities and absurdities in all, as deeply to impress you with the skepticism of history. The man of taste and discrimination, who has properly weighed these causes, will be apt to exclaim, ‘Dismiss me from the falsehood and impossibility of history, and deliver me over to the reality of romance’ (William Godwin, “Of History and Romance,” in *Things As They Are or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, Maurice Hindle, ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 367-371.) It is notable that in his essay Godwin, unlike Brown, ultimately makes a slight turn away from romance and back to the less contingent realm of history.

¹³ Hayden White, 24.

strata or of building walls and rooms – suggest images of layering or of enclosure that resonate with Edgar Huntly’s tendency to fill gaps in his understanding in order to construct “knowledge” throughout his travels. This tendency in turn evokes similar moves made by the colonial explorers Brown may once have thought of immortalizing in verse. Threatened with the irrationality of the unfamiliar, those explorers frequently ignored contradictions or assumed understanding in order to give their experiences structure. Metaphors of enclosed space and enclosed knowledge suggest ideas of containment paradoxically challenged by the image of the cave at *Edgar Huntly*’s center, an image that suggests a failure to rationalize knowledge and territory. Rather than evoking a contained space in which knowledge can be held, the cave induces an epistemological crisis of self, of space and land, and of history that highlights challenges to telling stories about land and about the past. Juxtaposing traditional images of Gothic enclosure with the disorientation of travel and encounter, *Edgar Huntly*, like many of Brown’s writings on history, troubles knowledge of a settler colonial present and future knowledge of a settler colonial past.

“Why should I proceed like a plotter?”

At the beginning of *Edgar Huntly* when the eponymous Edgar writes to his fiancée Mary Waldegrave, “What light has burst upon my ignorance of myself and of mankind! How sudden and enormous the transition from uncertainty to knowledge!” the reader might expect to encounter a tale of increasing understanding.¹⁴ Brown’s novel is structured to create and then subvert readerly expectations, however, and this purported claim to knowledge is only the first of many such moments. As Renée Bergland notes, it is significant that Edgar “speaks of his

¹⁴ Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*, Norman Grabo, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 6.

illuminated ignorance rather than any newfound self-knowledge or understanding” in the first sentence quoted above; as we soon find out, “Huntly acknowledges both particular and universal ignorances; he is equally in the dark about self and mankind.”¹⁵

Famously labeled a “maddeningly disorganized book,” *Edgar Huntly* takes the form of a letter from Edgar to Mary in which he documents his search for the murderer of Mary’s brother and Edgar’s friend, Waldegrave.¹⁶ The search quickly turns into an obsessive pursuit of an Irish farmhand, Clithero Edny, who is running from a bizarre series of events in Ireland. Clithero claims that he unwittingly killed his patroness’s twin brother after an unprovoked assault, and rashly decided that he must also kill his patroness, Mrs. Lorimer, in order to prevent the horrible death she insisted she would endure when her brother died. When Mrs. Lorimer stops Clithero from accidentally killing her niece Clarice (asleep in Mrs. Lorimer’s bed), he tells her of her brother’s death. She faints, and Clithero escapes, assuming her dead. Edgar later discovers Clithero sleepwalking in the Philadelphia countryside, digging a hole beneath the tree where Waldegrave was murdered; he then follows Clithero as he sleepwalks around the dramatic landscape.

Edgar’s pursuit of and apparent identification with Clithero eventually leads him to mysteriously sleepwalk into a cave himself. After waking in a pit deep within the cave, Edgar emerges into a realm populated with the Indians and panthers thought to have been “removed”

¹⁵ Renée Bergland, “Diseased States, Public Minds: Native American Ghosts in Early National Literature,” in *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination*, Ruth Binstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard, eds. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 91. Commenting on the same sentences, Scott Bradfield writes, “as readers proceed through Brown’s circuitous maze of false clues and postponed revelations, they only learn that every narrative ‘transition,’ so far as Brown is concerned, is itself terribly uncertain (*Dreaming Revolution: Transgression in the Development of American Romance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 24).

¹⁶ Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 144.

from the area and pushed further west.¹⁷ Edgar turns “savage,” first killing and eating a panther he encounters in the cave and then going on a brutal Indian-killing spree, reenacting the originary violence of “civilizing” the land. When he eventually finds his way back home, Edgar discovers that the stories he has constructed for himself along the way are inaccurate. What he thought he knew – of his sisters’ fates, of Clithero’s nature, of the region in which he lives – he does not, in fact, know.

Not surprisingly, psychoanalytic readings - difficult to ignore in a novel filled with doublings, attempted murders of parental figures, revenge narratives, and with an infamous scene in which Edgar wakes to find himself in a dark, womb-like cave – provided early critical points of entry into the novel. Leslie Fiedler set the stage for such readings, writing that Brown “substitutes the haunted forest...and the cave” for “the haunted castle and the dungeon” of the contemporary European novel, creating a new American Gothic in which “nature and not society becomes the symbol of evil.”¹⁸ More recent criticism has complicated Fiedler’s dichotomies. Where Fiedler sees Brown reimagining the Gothic protagonist as establishing “order in the chaotic and savage world of his own soul,”¹⁹ Carroll Smith-Rosenburg claims that *Edgar Huntly* “suggests that the Euro-American is always a divided self,” while Renée Bergland goes further:

¹⁷ Many scholars have noted the commonalities between Edgar and Clithero, “marking them as the first in a long tradition of psychological doubles out of which will be born the masterpieces of Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne” (Jared Gardner, “Alien Nation: Edgar Huntly’s Savage Awakening,” *American Literature* 66, no. 3 (September 1994), 450). See also, for example, Robert S. Levine, *Dislocating Race and Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century Literary Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 49. In “‘Man to Man I Needed Not to Dread His Encounter’: Edgar Huntly’s End of Erotic Pessimism” (in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*) Stephen Shapiro explores the relationship between the two men, arguing “that *Edgar Huntly*’s theme is the potential for and fate of homoerotics” (218).

¹⁸ Fiedler, 147, 148.

¹⁹ Bergland, “Diseased States, Public Minds,” 95.

“the European-American subject is founded on its own haunted ambivalence.”²⁰ The settler is always unsettled, doubled, colonized and colonizing.

While perhaps indicating anxieties about the self and the nation central to the period in which Brown wrote, the “haunted ambivalence” evident in the Gothic aspects of *Edgar Huntly*, from divided and mirrored selves to uncanny repetitions, is, then, also part of a longer tradition of American settler writing – one that engages with the epistemological and ontological crises of encounter and contact, with an unsteady world superficially under control but internally disconnected and plagued by the uncertainties that the deliberately fragmentary and inconsistent Gothic narrative highlights. From the first days of New World exploration, fantasies about the space of the Americas – about empty lands and riches – encountered contradictory nightmares. The earliest Euro-American writings – travel narratives and accounts written by visiting Europeans or colonists from Columbus to John Smith – are frequently characterized by fraught self-discovery, destabilizing uncertainty, and nightmarish confusion wrapped in the guise of confident assertions. The reappearance, in *Edgar Huntly*, of the epistemological questioning and disconnect of such travel narratives positions the novel not only as a commentary on various late eighteenth-century tensions and anxieties, but also within a tradition of writing in and about the New World that extends back to the first European narrative fruits of “the field of investigation,

²⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, “Subject Female: Authorizing American Identity,” *American Literary History* 5.3 (Fall 1993) 481,495, quoted in Bergland, 95. Smith-Rosenburg and Bergland’s readings, of course, represent examples of the historicized readings that followed Fiedler’s psychoanalytic approach. The novel has recently been read as representative of post-Revolutionary anxieties and cultural and political instabilities. (See, for example, Paul Downes, “Sleep-Walking out of the Revolution: Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 4 (1996 Summer): 413-31; Gardner, “Alien Nation”; Beverly R. Voloshin, “*Edgar Huntly* and the Coherence of the Self,” *Early American Literature* 23, no. 3 (1988): 276.) Other historical readings focus on more specific contexts, such as William Penn’s dealings with local Pennsylvania Indians in the late seventeenth-century and particular issues of land possession. (See Sydney J. Krause, “Penn’s Elm and *Edgar Huntly*: Dark ‘Instruction to the Heart,’” *American Literature* 66, no. 3 (September 1994): 463-84; Matthew Sivils, “Native American Sovereignty and Old Deb in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2001 Dec): 293-304; Chad Luck, “Re-Walking the Purchase: *Edgar Huntly*, David Hume, and the Origins of Ownership,” *Early American Literature* Vol. 44, Iss. 2 (2009): 271-306.)

opened” by the continent.²¹ *Edgar Huntly*, like Brown’s other novels, operates precisely through instabilities, contingences, and open questions about the possibilities of “knowing.” Edgar’s travel does not result in successful domestication of the land, nor does it result in stable knowledge.²² Rather, it raises questions about settler identities and about land claims that can also be seen as questions about historical knowledge, historical narrative, and historical claims.

Edgar Huntly can be read as a travel narrative from its first pages as the reader encounters Edgar leaving Mary Waldegrave for a “nocturnal journey in districts...romantic and wild.”²³ We have already been prepared to explore the physical and moral terrain of America by Brown’s address “To the Public,” in which he calls up “the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country,” setting America against Europe and planning “to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country.”²⁴ A sense of exploration, discovery, and curiosity is, then, inherent from the outset and the travel that ensues is much more significant than Edgar’s initial plan for a “nocturnal journey” suggests. Before long, Edgar’s pursuit of Clithero brings him to unfamiliar places that he encounters through the rhetoric of “first

²¹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 3.

²² Critics who have treated Edgar as a traveler or explorer have sometimes read his travels as being successful from a colonial point of view, emphasizing his possession of the American wilderness through the various forms of traveling that he undertakes rather than the instability of the experience of such travel. Timothy Francis Strobe, for example, explores the way the novel uses narrative to take possession “in a territorial sense” (*The Ethics of Exile: Colonialism in the Fictions of Charles Brockden Brown and J.M. Coetzee* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 47). Similarly, readings of Edgar as a “picturesque traveler” possessing the sublime American landscape through a controlling aesthetic vision render him a “successful” colonial explorer rather than dwelling on the critical instabilities of Edgar’s understanding and the terror that lies in the experience of his “exploration.” (See Dennis Berthod, “Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, and the Origins of the American Picturesque,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1984 Jan.): 62-84 and Beth L. Lueck, “Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*: The Picturesque Traveler as Sleepwalker,” *Studies in American Fiction* 15, no. 1 (1987 Spring): 25-42 for discussion of the picturesque. See Norman S. Grabo, *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 63 and Strobe for readings of Edgar’s movement toward civilization.)

²³ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 6.

²⁴ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 3.

discovery”: “It was probable that human feet had never before gained this recess, that human eyes had never been fixed upon these gushing waters,” reflects Edgar of one trip through a sublime landscape in search of Clithero. “The aboriginal inhabitants had no motives to lead them into caves like this, and ponder on the verge of such a precipice. Their successors were still less likely to have wandered hither. Since the birth of this continent, I was probably the first who had deviated thus remotely from the customary paths of men.”²⁵ Edgar’s sense of discovery is immediately undermined when he looks across a chasm and sees Clithero, who has already been coded as an Indian in Edgar’s mind, drawing on complicated associations between Indians and Irish as the “other.”²⁶ The scene’s ironic play with doctrines of first discovery and the bravado of the explorer is clear. There is already someone here.

More than the actual traveling that Edgar undertakes in the novel aligns the text with earlier travel narratives, however. The novel’s epistolary structure carries out similar work. Unlike other eighteenth-century epistolary novels consisting of multiple letters written back and forth between characters, *Edgar Huntly* is comprised of one long letter and an appendix of three short letters. All but the last short letter are written by Edgar himself so that his is really the only voice that the reader hears. (The stories of other characters, like Clithero, are related through Edgar’s narration to Mary.)²⁷ As with colonial travel narratives, a monologue poses as a

²⁵ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 99.

²⁶ See Barnard and Shapiro, “Introduction,” xxii, for a discussion of this association: “In the aftermath of English colonialism in Ireland and massive Irish immigration to Pennsylvania, Anglo-Quakers viewed the Irish – particularly those from the same northern (Ulster) Protestant areas of Ireland as this novel’s character Clithero – not just as a rival immigrant people, but as barbaric ethno-racial others every bit as savage and threatening as Indians.”

²⁷ Brown’s other novels take up similar narrative forms. *Wieland* is a letter from Clara Wieland to an interested friend. *Arthur Mervyn* is a complicated, polyglot narrative comprised of Dr. Stevens’ narration of Arthur’s narration of Welbeck’s narration, which, in the end, suddenly turns into a document that Mrs. Wentworth has asked Arthur to put together about his adventures. *Ormond* is Sophia Westwyn letter to “I.E. Rosenberg” offering a history of Constantia Dudley’s life. The instability of these first-person letters and documents and the issues of limited and potentially faulty, misleading perspectives that they raise highlight the questions about truth and narration that run throughout Brown’s writings. For another

dialogue. Edgar speaks for others, recounting their stories in their “own” voices but channeling those stories through his voice and consciousness and refusing to give voice to some characters entirely. (As Fiedler has noted, in *Edgar Huntly* “Brown’s aboriginal shadows do not speak.” African-American characters are entirely absent, except as pupils in the “Negro free-school” where Waldegrave taught before his death.)²⁸ This does not, however, mean that the narrative is uniform and linear, without fragmentation or structural gaps. Indeed, it contains numerous ruptures as one chapter ends abruptly only for the next to continue in a different place or time, lending the entire novel a sense of disjointed disruption, a structure of serialization that moves forward episodically.²⁹ Like many explorers, Edgar commits his experiences to paper after the fact and consciously does so for the benefit of another. His narrative thus suffers from problems of memory, as well as from instability and unreliability resulting from efforts to structure a

brief discussion of these “historicizing narrators” see Amanda Emerson, “The Early American Novel: Charles Brockden Brown’s Fictitious Historiography,” *Novel*, Fall 2006: 40, 1/2, 134. It is tempting to position Brown’s narrative formulations in these novels within a transitional space between full-fledged eighteenth-century epistolary novels, like *Clarissa* or *Charlotte Temple*, which are comprised of multiple voices and so are “composite,” or fragmented, and the more “unified” narrative voices of third-person narrators in early nineteenth-century novels. While I believe that there are valid reasons for positing this progression in terms of the development of the novel, there seem to be dangers in overlaying larger claims about national development or national identity onto such an observation. Emerson seems to make such a problematic move when, in her concluding paragraph, she states that the “historical romances of the 1820s-40s, despite their split focus on the implicit nineteenth-century present and the past they narrate, feature a coherence in voice and vision unavailable to Brown, a coherence that springs from the very foundation of national unity that constitutes both the goal and, it would seem, the product of such early narrators as Brown and his fictitious history-tellers” (146). This is an example of the overly narrow narratives of linear progression, whether of historiography, narrative form, or national identity, that I hope to disrupt and bring into question throughout this project.

²⁸ Fiedler, 146. Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 136. For the notion of the monologue as dialogue see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1986), 9, 20, and Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 159. Students are often eager to note the lack of labor depicted in the novel. They wonder who does the farm work while Edgar is roaming the countryside, which inevitably leads to questions about slavery, the Quaker stance on slavery, and the brief mention of Waldegrave’s “school of blacks.” This, in turn, quickly leads back to Quaker pacifism and Edgar’s violence.

²⁹ It is notable that *Edgar Huntly* had its origins in another work, Brown’s first novel *Sky-walk: A Man Unknown to Himself* (now lost), a fragment of which was published as “Extract from the ‘Sky-Walk’” in the *Weekly Magazine* 1.8 (March 24, 1798), 228-231. Thus the novel has its beginnings in the serial form.

coherent narrative and to find language for experiences that cannot be made narratable without ignoring disjunctures or filling in gaps in knowledge.

Indeed, Edgar frequently pauses to grapple with this inability to narrate. At the beginning of the novel he questions whether he is calm enough to write, struggling to imagine “That the incidents I am going to relate can be recalled and arranged without indistinctness and confusion? That emotions will not be re-awakened by my narrative, incompatible with order and coherence?”³⁰ He repeatedly draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the very exercise of reporting and representing his bizarre experiences is a fraught one. Later he doubts his ability to relate his experiences “in an intelligible manner. One image runs into another, sensations succeed in so rapid a train, that I fear, I shall be unable to distribute and express them with sufficient perspicuity.”³¹ This language of images melding into one another foregrounds the instabilities of a narrative in which perceived reality and illusion blend, in which relationships between cause and effect cannot necessarily be clearly posited, and in which contradictions are repressed.³²

Edgar’s difficulty narrating unfamiliar, bizarre scenes and experiences “without indistinctness and confusion” is compounded by the various mysteries that run parallel to the themes of discovery and exploration within the novel. He begins his pursuit of knowledge seeking Waldegrave’s murderer, and his tendency to fill in gaps in understanding, passing off a partial story for a whole, first becomes evident through this plotline. Just three pages into the novel, Edgar describes an extended imagined scene in which he “witnessed” his friend’s death:

³⁰ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 5.

³¹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 152.

³² In her comprehensive study of the Gothic as it intersects with Scott’s fiction, Fiona Robertson notes that a breakdown of language and themes of questioning individual perception and the authority of the observer are standard gothic conventions (81; 92). They are conventions that highlight questions about exploration narratives, representation, and history discussed here.

“I heard the discharge of the pistol, I witnessed the alarm of Inglefield, I heard his calls to his servants, and saw them issue forth, with lights and hasten to the spot whence the sound had seemed to proceed. I beheld my friend, stretched upon the earth, ghastly with a mortal wound, alone.”³³ Refusing alternative narratives from the very beginning through his imagining of this fateful scene, Edgar goes on to encounter Clithero digging beneath the elm tree where Waldegrave was found murdered. He not only fills a gap in his knowledge by assuming this activity to be connected to his friend’s murder, but he also makes Clithero “known” as a savage “other,” “robust and strange, and half naked” with “brawny arms and lofty stature” (an ironic assumption given that Waldegrave turns out to have been murdered by the Indians Edgar imagines in this moment).³⁴

Edgar’s attitude toward Clithero is immediately linked to that of the colonial “I/eye” as he decides that Clithero is the prime suspect in the murder and that he must “become the subject of my scrutiny. I was to gain all the knowledge, respecting him, which those with whom he lived...could impart.”³⁵ Quickly adopting the tone of ethnographic possession frequently underlying travel narratives, Edgar’s compulsion to “know” Clithero is, in some senses, pure compulsion divorced from any purpose outside of its pursuit. “Curiosity,” reflects Edgar, “like virtue, is its own reward. Knowledge is of value for its own sake, and pleasure is annexed to the acquisition, without regard to any thing beyond.”³⁶ Claims of pure curiosity often belie hidden motives, however, and Edgar’s compulsion to “know” is complicated by his simultaneous

³³ See Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 7-8.

³⁴ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 10-11. See Gardner for a discussion of Clithero as an Irish/Indian “other.”

³⁵ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 15.

³⁶ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 16.

sympathy for Clithero, his belief that he “knows” what is best for him, and his circumscribed reading of Clithero’s story – a reading that he endeavors to impart to Clithero.³⁷

Ironically, when first deciding to confront Clithero, Edgar reasons that a direct approach is best since his intentions are harmless: “Wiles and stratagems were practicable, but they were tedious and of dubious success. Why should I proceed like a plotter? Do I intend the injury of this person?”³⁸ In invoking the notion of plot, Edgar intends, of course, to distance himself from notions of conspiracy and premeditated harm, but he simultaneously suggests the work of narrative emplotment to which he subjects Clithero’s life and emotions, hearing the Irishman’s story but completing it in his own way. And he suggests the work of spatial plotting within the novel, to which this chapter will eventually turn.

One of the novel’s ironies is, then, that Edgar’s “benevolent” reading and his desire to save Clithero may lead to the latter’s ruin (suggesting comparisons to later “civilization” programs intended to aid Native Americans). Though Edgar does not intend injury, he eventually causes it. His vision is limited and compromised. He finds “truth” in what is available to his eyes, allowing his mind to fill in the rest. (His new friend Weymouth, for example, looks the part of a man who has wrongly lost his fortune: “The story, hadst thou observed the features and guize of the relater, would have won thy implicit credit. His countenance exhibited deep traces of the afflictions he had endured.”³⁹) And like the colonial explorers who went before him, Edgar represses consideration of the effects of his circumscribed

³⁷ “How should I convince him that since the death of Wiatte was not intended, the deed was without crime,” reflects Edgar. “That, if it had been deliberately concerted, it was still a virtue, since his own life could, by no other means, be preserved; that when he pointed a dagger at the bosom of his mistress he was actuated, not by avarice, or ambition, or revenge, or malice. He desired to confer on her the highest and the only benefit of which he believed her capable. He sought to rescue her from tormenting regrets and lingering agonies” (Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 106).

³⁸ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 16-17.

³⁹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 147.

readings. He does not, for example, consider what his assumption of Clithero's guilt will do to Clithero. As the Irishman exclaims before launching into his tale, "You [Edgar], like others, are blind to the most momentous consequences of your own actions."⁴⁰

Rooms of Knowledge

Edgar's attempts to "know" and to "civilize" Clithero, and his surroundings, along with his pointedly contradictory violent actions and his anxiety about his place in a developing settler society and economy, position him within a colonial project that relies on what an unidentified dedicatory poem to Williams Wood's *New England Prospect* (1634) terms "Much knowledge in so small room, comptly placed."⁴¹ Wood had spent four years in Massachusetts and published his book to share knowledge about the New World with readers in England. Describing geology, flora and fauna, settlements, and how to avoid various pests (wolves, mosquitoes), the book is a description of a place, a handbook, and a short history all at once. In the volume's dedicatory poem, as David Read points out, Wood is praised for building neat rooms "to accommodate what [he] refers to as 'personal and experimental knowledge' of the colonial scene."⁴² This image of the "rooms" of knowledge produced through colonial texts is an appropriate one for the readings of first encounters and colonial struggles that often characterize writings emerging from colonial situations. People and places are captured and "known" through language and contained within the walls of the books written about them, as Edgar struggles to make his own experiences knowable.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 35.

⁴¹ Quoted in David Read, *New World, Known World: Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 1.

⁴² Read, 1-2.

We now, of course, recognize the instability of those “rooms” of knowledge and the fraught conditions under which they were constructed. We recognize that the “horror” of the early modern travel narrative lies not only in fear of contact with the unknown, but also in fear of the collapse of familiar structures of knowledge and meaning as a result of the disjunctures of an unfamiliar situation, and that those fears bear on the narration of new experiences in unfamiliar places. As Jonathan Hart writes, “In ‘discovering’ the New World, the authors and readers [of travel narratives] would discover their own Old World anew” - never an easy or simple prospect.⁴³ Thanks to the work of scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt, it is now a commonplace that the non-European world was produced for European “imperial eyes” in the writings of explorers and travelers who worked to make the unfamiliar knowable, but the challenges and threats to the European self and to narration of personal experience involved in that production cannot be overlooked.⁴⁴

As the ur-text of Western exploration narratives, perhaps one that Brown had in mind when sketching his youthful plan for an epic poem based on the discovery of America (one that was certainly in the air that same year when Barlow published his own poem), Christopher Columbus’ journals provide an example of the horrific ambiguity of contact carefully contained within the imperial discourse of possession. Modern readers trained to recognize the instability of “rooms” of knowledge might notice that the relationship between “reality” and “illusion” (or

⁴³ Jonathan Hart, *Columbus, Shakespeare and the Interpretation of the New World* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2. See also Andrew Smith and Williams Hughes, eds., *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁴ See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992). See Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* for a discussion of “the colonization of languages, of memory, of space” that highlights the process of understanding as it emerges from “coevolutionary histories as alternatives to evolutionary ones told from a locus of enunciation constructed as the master locus” (15; 329). In emphasizing the plurality beneath the monolithic story of “New World” discovery (invention), Mignolo further exposes the way “modernity occluded the pluriversal under the persuasive discourse of the universal” (435).

delusion) is fraught from the very beginning of Columbus' voyage. (His log-book, for example, indicates that he purposefully underreported the distance traveled each day so as not to alarm his crew about the great distance they had actually gone.) Modern readers might acknowledge the heavily mediated nature of the texts that have come down through history to give us Columbus' story. (A number of interlocutors interpreted, digested, and, of course, translated, Columbus' experiences and words in crafting his "story.") But the text itself merely seems to report and does not dwell on disjunctures. Instead, as critics such as Peter Hulme and Eric Cheyfitz have noted, Columbus takes control of the situation, and possession of the land and people he encounters, through language, through discourse.⁴⁵

The rhetorical moves used by *conquistadors* and other colonial figures to effect domestication and meaning-making are, by now, well-known. Throughout his writings, for example, Columbus performs the work of colonization by making the unfamiliar landscape known through comparisons to Spain. "Here and throughout the island the trees and plants are as green as in Andalusia in April," he writes, making familiar not just the weather but also an island itself.⁴⁶ Similarly, Columbus gives structure to his repetitive, seemingly unending voyage by creating a narrative in which each island is more beautiful than the previous so that movement is always forward toward an Edenic goal, rather than cyclical and monotonous. And perhaps most notably, the islands' native inhabitants are "known" to Columbus and his men. Understanding of their language and their customs is presupposed. Some are cannibals, even lacking "ocular evidence," while some are presumed peaceful compared to the fear-inspiring Caribs.⁴⁷ Everything is new and unfamiliar, yet gaps in knowledge or understanding are filled in

⁴⁵ See, for example, Cheyfitz, 105-06, 109-10 and Hulme, 13-43.

⁴⁶ Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, J.M. Cohen, ed. and trans. (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 70.

⁴⁷ Columbus, 122, 99.

since the questions at the heart of the situation cannot be entertained without spiraling European identity into a phantasmic abyss.⁴⁸

There are fleeting moments within Columbus' narrative, however, when such questions do rise to the surface, only to be forcibly covered over. When reporting a meeting with a native "king," for example, Columbus comments, "He [the 'king'] and his counselors were extremely sorry that they could not understand me, nor I them. Nevertheless I understood him to say that if there was anything I wanted, the whole island was at my disposal."⁴⁹ Here, a gap, a disjuncture, occurs between the two sentences – a pause of threatening irrationality and a potential admission that not only do Columbus and the natives not understand each other, but that, consequently, Columbus might not understand himself or his position in this world. If his ability to understand and to read this space of encounter is compromised, Columbus and his project are left flailing in space. This momentary threat is quickly averted with the words "Nevertheless I understood him to say," as Columbus turns back to what Eric Cheyfitz terms his "attempts to domesticate the farfetched in his recurring fantasy that he understands the Indians' language," resulting in purportedly stable knowledge still threatened beneath the surface by the collapse of categories of meaning and knowledge.⁵⁰

Indeed, the colonial travel narrative is an ideological construct, "the imaginary relation [of the travelers] to the real relations [of travel] in which they live," in which the traveler frequently abides by a set of imaginary relationships, imagined knowledge, and imagined

⁴⁸ Among these questions might be, as Hart writes, "What is this world that appears before me? What is the relation between I and others and is there a possibility of speaking about an 'us'? What are these signs before me or us and are they constant or changing or is there a constancy beneath the change or a change beneath the constancy?," (1).

⁴⁹ Columbus, 89.

⁵⁰ Cheyfitz, 110.

understanding which he or she cannot fully question or explore.⁵¹ To travel refusing to admit contradictions, refusing to admit that “they could not understand me, nor I them,” is to travel in a narrative of one’s own construction, under one’s own control, whereas to admit disjunctures and the inability to “know” is to enter a realm of estrangement from the familiar – a world without referent where categories of meaning become destabilized, providing a glimpse out of the “room” of knowledge into a void too frightening to be considered.

This fractured narrative aesthetic occurs throughout New World travel narratives, indicating potential epistemological crises and the work of averting them. For example, Cabeza de Vaca’s account of his time spent wandering through America from 1527 to 1536, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America* (often known as *La Relación* or *Naufragios*) makes the standard claim to be fulfilling a duty to “transmit what I [de Vaca] saw and heard in the nine years I wandered lost and miserable over many remote lands” so that the knowledge might be used “to subdue those countries and bring them to a knowledge of the true faith and true Lord.”⁵² De Vaca seeks to give knowledge to Europeans so that they may be better able to give knowledge to “heathens” and to that end he claims to “have written very exactly,” yet the narrative is remarkable for its lack of detail and, on occasion, De Vaca struggles with the very telling of the narrative.⁵³ He glosses over difficult or disturbing moments (or necessarily forgets them) as he seeks to maintain narrative control, eliding personal disjunctures, but simultaneously creating more gaps for the reader of his text. “I will not prolong this unpleasantness,” he writes early in his adventure, “but you can imagine what it would be like in a strange, remote land,

⁵¹ Cheyfitz, 208, quoting Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 36.

⁵² Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*, Cyclone Covey, ed. and trans. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 25, 26.

⁵³ de Vaca, 26.

destitute of means either to remain or to get out.”⁵⁴ De Vaca withholds narrative “unpleasantness,” but leaves the reader to “imagine” and to cope with the irreconcilable oppositions that the narrative ignores, so that the reader is in the position of explorer. This happens again only a few pages later: “I state this [that they were in a small barge for eleven days without water and that some men died from drinking salt water] briefly because I think it superfluous to tell in detail what we went through in those circumstances. Considering where we were and how little hope we had of relief, you may sufficiently imagine our sufferings.”⁵⁵ Offering more details would force De Vaca to confront the confusion of his situation – to confront contradictions that need to be hidden in order for him to narrate with any level of coherence.

At still other moments in the narrative it becomes clear that the sketchiness of “*La Relación*” results from the fact that de Vaca simply could not find language for his experiences, nor could he make sense of what was happening around him as he moved through a foreign land, cut off from all familiar cultural norms and teetering in an irrational realm where he could not comprehend the relationship between cause and effect. He reports, for example, being well-treated by a group of Indians who “regaled” the “travelers” with “a great quantity of cooked fish,” and yet who attacked them in the middle of the night, killing three men. De Vaca relates this anecdote in a straight-forward manner, making the ambush seem completely unprovoked, in typical travel or captivity narrative fashion (“In the middle of the night, the Indians fell on us without warning...”).⁵⁶ It is possible that de Vaca has conveniently forgotten what it was that

⁵⁴ de Vaca, 44.

⁵⁵ de Vaca, 48.

⁵⁶ de Vaca, 49.

led to this attack, or that he never understood its cause in the first place, lacking the ability or willingness to connect cause and effect or to confront the contradictions within the situation.⁵⁷

Nearly a century later, similar moments appear in John Smith's 1608 "A True Relation," a text that is even sketchier in its outlines than de Vaca's, although popular historical myths crafted over subsequent centuries have made Smith "known," constructing a tale of American origins by ignoring the uncertainties that Smith seems to have wanted or needed to ignore himself. Known as a brash and violent military man, Smith tears through his narrative as he must have wanted to see himself tearing through the wilds of Virginia, in control of every situation that he encounters. For example, he gives himself agency when describing his captivity in "A True Relation," asserting that he wooed his captor by showing "a compasse diall, describing by my best means the use thereof."⁵⁸ We can now recognize that Smith lacked the language skills and cultural knowledge that would have enabled him to describe the use of a compass to his Indian captor and to win respect and kind treatment through a display of technology, but such attempts to demonstrate control persist throughout the narrative. "Their cruell mindes towards the fort I had deverted," Smith boasts, "in describing the ordinance and the mines in the fields, as also the revenge Captain Newport would take of them at his returne."⁵⁹ Again, Smith ignores problems of communication, not to mention the fact that he was

⁵⁷ David Mickelsen ultimately attributes the narrative's minimalism to de Vaca's familiarity with the cultures and practices that he describes, maintaining that one does not elaborate on what has become second nature. This conclusion seems problematic, however, since travel narratives written by individuals who spent days rather than years in a given situation are similarly characterized by disjuncture and thin description. Mickelsen also problematically ignores issues of memory when examining the fact that de Vaca's narrative becomes increasingly descriptive as it goes along, the first half of the text covering six years and the latter half only two. (See David Mickelsen, "'Magic,' Realism, and Ethnographic Detail: Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*," *Readerly/Writerly Texts* 10, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2002-2003), 69-70).

⁵⁸ Captain John Smith, "A True Relation, 1608," in *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625*, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 44. See also Cheyfitz, 79-82.

⁵⁹ Smith, 45-46.

overwhelmingly outnumbered and that threats of revenge, even if successfully communicated, would not have been very troubling.

It is impossible to piece together a clear idea of what is occurring in Smith's disjointed tale, impossible to gauge what "happened" and why through the rough outline that Smith provides, probably because he did not have an easy time understanding what was happening himself. Meaning again lies in the text's gaps, but Smith cannot address those gaps without challenging his worldview and identity as Smith the European explorer and conqueror. He recounts the tale of his capture and his eventual release in a straightforward manner, ending "A True Relation" with the optimistic proclamation that he and the other "adventurers" will "see our Nation to enjoy a Country, not onely exceeding pleasant for habitation, but also very profitable for commerce in general; no doubt pleasing to almightie God."⁶⁰ Smith's narrative is without "doubt" because he cannot allow himself to doubt his own success or providential approval of his actions. Smith, like de Vaca and Columbus before him, relies on the explorer and proto-ethnographer's "naked assertion of experience as an eye-witness"⁶¹ in claiming truth for his narrative, allowing the eye to see, but refusing to allow the mind and pen to confront confusion about what is seen.⁶²

Through such irreconcilable gaps in understanding and in knowledge and through the terror of losing one's sense of self in a world where categories crumble, the aesthetic of early

⁶⁰ Smith, 71.

⁶¹ Mickelsen, 67.

⁶² Significantly, in part because of the haziness of his narratives and the blurry lines between fact and fiction within them, Smith's writings became a source of contention for historians by the mid-nineteenth century. Gregory M. Pfitzer notes that "As early as the 1860s, New England scholars affiliated with the American Antiquarian Society such as Charles Deane and Henry Adams had begun to argue persuasively that much of what John Smith had said about himself in the *General History of Virginia* was exaggerated and perhaps untrue, especially the apocryphal Pocahontas legend" (*Popular History and the Literary Marketplace: 1840-1920* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 141). Nevertheless, some historians insisted on upholding the mythological status of Smith's character and the narratives that he spun. See also Pfitzer, 90-91.

exploration and travel narratives enters into dialogue with a gothic aesthetic with its own disjunctures and absences. As such, *Edgar Huntly* does not merely posit existential questions about the coherence of the self in a post-Enlightenment age, but embeds those questions in threats to colonial identity and threats to coherent narration of both present and past. These threats had been covered over, filled in, and elided, wittingly and unwittingly, from the earliest days of New World contact. As Scott Bradfield has written, “American colonial ideology is driven by a sense of perpetual absence; colonists are always driven to find what isn’t there and to complete what can never be finished.”⁶³ Such absences and gaps in understanding, knowledge, and narrative cause *Edgar Huntly*, like early American travel narratives, to problematize “the transition from uncertainty to knowledge” that the novel begins by claiming as its structure, reflecting absences and gaps in understanding, knowledge, and coherent narration that plague the project of settlement that eventually followed these moments of contact.

Finding What Isn’t There

Since Brown does not narrate an actual experience of irrational disjuncture in an unfamiliar place - since he reflects on but is not experiencing the confusion of Columbus, de Vaca, or Smith - *Edgar Huntly* dares to expose the threatening disconnections of the colonial experience much more explicitly than do “non-fictional” travel narratives. This is foregrounded in the description of the most extensive journey that Edgar undergoes in the novel, beginning with his sleepwalking and the infamous cave scene, and extending through his struggles to escape from the labyrinthine region known as Norwalk. These struggles concern what Edgar knows, does not know, or what he thinks he knows yet refuses to acknowledge.

⁶³ Bradfield, 30. This observation echoes Hulme’s more general claim that “One of the ways in which ideologies work is by passing off partial accounts as the whole story” (15).

When Edgar wakes in a cave, remembering laying aside his clothes and throwing himself upon his bed, but nothing more, he is completely cut off from the outside world, “conscious, for a time, of nothing but existence.”⁶⁴ He describes his return to consciousness, and then the process of gradually opening his eyes, yet even with eyes open “the darkness that environed [him] was as intense as before.” “I turned my head to different quarters,” he remembers. “I stretched my eye-lids, and exerted every visual energy, but in vain. I was wrapt in the murkiest and most impenetrable gloom...my sight availed nothing to the knowledge of my condition.”⁶⁵ Here, Edgar is an explorer hovering over the abyss of irrationality, marooned in an unfamiliar place, “neither naked nor clothed.” Not even his sight can help him, and the language of disorientation enters the scene nearly immediately. “I endeavoured to recall the past, but the past was too much in contradiction to the present, and my intellect was too much shattered by external violence, to allow me to accurately review it,” reflects Edgar.⁶⁶ “I existed as it were in a wakeful dream,” he continues, “With nothing to correct my erroneous perceptions.”⁶⁷

Floating in a space without referent, Edgar has recourse only to knowledge of the self as he attempts to locate himself, using the sound of his voice to determine “the dimensions of the place” and, in the process, deducing his location since the sound produced is a familiar one. One of the most notable aspects of this scene of existential trauma is the “respective positions of the narrating I and the experiencing I,” which emphasize the “relation of the I to itself.”⁶⁸ The narrating I hovers over the acting I here, as in all travel narratives, attempting to make past experiences coherent by smoothing out contradictions, resisting chaos and irrationality and moving swiftly past horrors such as Edgar’s intense hunger and his subsequent feast of panther.

⁶⁴ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 152.

⁶⁵ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 153.

⁶⁶ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 153.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 153, 154.

⁶⁸ Strode, 126.

“Now that it [the experience of eating panther] is past I look back upon it as on some hideous dream,” Edgar writes to Mary. “The whole appears to be some freak of insanity. No alternative was offered, and hunger was capable to be appeased, even by a banquet so detestable.”⁶⁹

Hurrying past the implications of his actions and focusing instead on their necessity and on his subsequent illness, Edgar seeks to justify his deeds at the same time that he disowns them, placing them in the realm of “some hideous dream.” This rupture between action and narration makes it clear that despite Edgar’s efforts to relate his tale coherently and to eliminate contradictions, as readers “the narrative dwells in our sense of a gap between the observing self and the self observed.”⁷⁰

Brown emphasizes Edgar’s efforts to forge coherence throughout the rest of his adventure. “I was wholly unacquainted with the scene before me,” he reflects after describing his emergence from the cave, his first murder of an Indian, and his rescue of a Euro-American girl held captive by the group of Indians he finds at an outlet of the cave. “No marks of habitation or culture, no traces of the foot-steps of men, were discernible. I scarcely knew in what region of the globe I was placed.”⁷¹ This disorientation is complicated by the fact that while Edgar does not know the part of the wilderness that he finds himself in (indeed, it is a decidedly unknowable space, full of “vexatious obstacles” and “a continual succession of hollows and prominences”), he is quite familiar with the surrounding area in general. He also uses a “Tom-hawk” to dispatch both animal and Indian, indicating his co-signed status in “civilization” as well as in the wilderness and raising critical questions about selfhood, identity, and identification.⁷² Disorientation also stems from the fact that the Indians and panthers Edgar

⁶⁹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 160.

⁷⁰ Strode, 127.

⁷¹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 174.

⁷² Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 175.

encounters were thought to have been safely “removed” to the western frontier, eradicated entirely, or at least successfully tamed. Their continued presence, or Edgar’s foray into a realm where they still pose a threat, disrupts narratives of progressive settlement.

While Edgar has “knowledge” of the wilderness and the natives associated with it, then, much of what he thinks that he knows proves to be false. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the character of Old Deb, the one Lenni Lenape (Delaware Indian) known to have stayed behind after her tribe was forced off of their land thirty years earlier (land which, significantly, is now the site of Edgar’s uncle’s farm). Edgar makes efforts to claim and tame Old Deb through the process of naming (it is Edgar who gives the woman her nickname, “Queen Mab”) and to engage with her (albeit in a condescending manner) by “observing her habits and humour[ing] her prejudices,” and by studying “her jargon [so he] could make out to discourse with her on the few ideas which she possessed.”⁷³ But despite Edgar’s sense that he “knows” Old Deb, he does not learn that she is orchestrating attacks on white settlers until the very end of the novel. The story that Edgar has constructed for himself about the old Indian woman is one that he needs to believe, but one that is far from the truth.

Edgar never openly admits his utter confusion as he recounts his “adventure,” however.⁷⁴ Instead, he forges ahead, his reading of each situation necessarily pieced together from what he can glean, but inevitably pieced together incorrectly. For example, upon noticing that a gun he has taken from an Indian is his own he immediately concludes that the Huntly farm had been

⁷³ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 199, 200.

⁷⁴ Though he does sometimes catalogue the various options that he perceived at certain moments, according to his perception of circumstances. For example, after escaping from the cave and killing his first Indian he reflects: “What remained but to precipitate my flight? I might speedily place myself beyond all danger. I might gain some hospitable shelter, where my fatigues might be repaired by repose, and my wounds be cured. I might likewise impart to my protectors seasonable information of the enemies who meditated their destruction. I thought upon the condition of the hapless girl whom I had left in the power of the savages. Was it impossible to rescue her? Might I not relieve her from her bonds, and make her the companion of my flight?” (173).

raided: “I needed no proof of my calamity more incontestable than this. My uncle and my sisters had been murdered; the dwelling had been pillaged, and this had been a part of the plunder.”⁷⁵

The limited narrative possibilities that Edgar can entertain, or, rather, the options that he unwittingly selects from a multitude of possibilities, are again evident when he justifies having killed yet another Indian with the thought that the Indian must have “born his part in the destruction of my uncle and my sisters” and so deserves to die.⁷⁶ Of course, as Edgar later discovers, the family farm had not been ambushed, nor had his sisters been killed. Justifications for his actions and his sense of his position in the wilderness had been born of a series of suppositions. Narratives had been pieced together from observations, but those narratives could not, as the reader (and Edgar) eventually discover, be accepted uncritically.

Other examples of Edgar’s circumscribed reading practices are numerous. Indian characters are mere sketches, and all of their habits are easily known.⁷⁷ When men are seen “following each other in that straight and regular succession which is peculiar to the Indians” they must necessarily be Indians.⁷⁸ (They are, it turns out, Europeans, including none other than Edgar’s surrogate father, Sarsefield.) As Weymouth is judged to be telling the truth from his appearance, a house that appears “the model of cleanliness and comfort” is judged to possess

⁷⁵ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 178. Here one thinks of reports of cannibalism from Columbus and other explorers. Bones were seen, so men must have eaten each other. A partial account becomes a whole. The gap between an observed effect and an unseen cause is bridged through an act of imagination. It is also notable that in this moment Edgar’s tendency to construct pre-determined, circumscribed readings of situations and the repression of his parent’s murders at the hands of Indians collide in his assumptions about the fate of his uncle and sisters.

⁷⁶ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 191.

⁷⁷ “The slumber of an Indian is broken by the slightest noise...they always sit upon their haunches, and, leaning their elbows on their knees, consume the tedious hours in smoking” (Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 167). As Harriet Hustis writes, “Throughout his narrative, Huntly overwrites the ‘real’ intentions of the Indians (of which he has no ‘real’ knowledge) by supplying in its place his culturally legitimated ‘knowledge’ of their ‘savagery’” (Hustis, “Deliberate Unknowing and Strategic Retelling: The Ravages of Cultural Desire in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*,” *Studies in American Fiction* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 116).

⁷⁸ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 210.

inhabitants with whom Edgar can “claim consanguinity.”⁷⁹ The resident proves to be a violent drunkard, however, again illustrating Edgar’s inability to read correctly (in this case a misreading based on ideologies of class). And even when Edgar is told the truth, he cannot hear it. When, upon nearing his town, Edgar is given news of the Indian attacks that had occurred during his absence, including the fact that a girl had been captured and then rescued, he persists in imagining it to be one of his sisters rather than the girl he himself had just liberated from the Indians. Edgar is persistently blinded by the stories that he has constructed. Like Columbus, he does not understand, yet must insist on understanding in order to make sense of his experiences.

Edgar’s misreading – his tendency to complete a narrative according to the information available to him, but to complete it incorrectly - persists through the novel’s conclusion. Although the complicated plotlines merge in Sarsefield’s appearance (Sarsefield had been Edgar’s tutor and serves as a paternal figure) and Sarsefield’s news that Mrs. Lorimer has arrived in New York as his wife, although Edgar claims to have glimpsed his own “complicated errors,” he is still mistaken.⁸⁰ Reasoning that Clithero is innocent of any wrongdoing, Edgar tells him of Mrs. Lorimer’s arrival, and only then discovers that he has been wrong about Clithero from the beginning; Clithero is, in fact, “a maniac.”⁸¹ Despite his claims to knowledge, sympathy, and understanding it becomes clear that the only knowledge Edgar has gained, should he choose to recognize it, is of his inability to know. The light that has burst upon his ignorance illuminates his ignorance, but little more. That ignorance has been unwittingly repressed throughout his narrative as he denies and smoothes over contradictions, creating an alternate “reality” only punctuated by destabilizing glimpses into those ruptures and contradictions.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 217.

⁸⁰ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 234.

⁸¹ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 280.

The novel's conclusion finds Edgar awash in a sea of relativity. Experiences have momentarily foregrounded the instability of knowledge: "How little cognizance have men over the actions and motives of each other! How total is our blindness with regard to our own performances!"⁸² It is doubtful, however, whether this reflection extends far beyond the immediate circumstances for Edgar. The Indians are, for example, still "known," since to admit otherwise would be to force Edgar to confront his killing spree and the problems of the colonial endeavor more generally. Nevertheless, in ending with a focus on the gaps in knowledge that Edgar ignores, fills in, or glosses over throughout his narrative, Brown points out that they have been there the entire time. Sites of ignored and elided contradictions which, if confronted, would destabilize meaning and knowledge, those gaps evoke the epistemological and narrative spaces between Columbus' "They could not understand me, nor I them," and his recourse to the seemingly innocuous, but loaded words, "Nevertheless, I understood him to say that...the whole island was at my disposal." Navigating ruptures in understanding in the colonial context, these sentences remind us, is also about navigating (and claiming) space and land.

Blank Spaces

The rupture between observed effect and assumed cause, between an experienced moment and an understanding of that experience, recalls the image of the pit within the cave where Edgar wakes from his sleepwalking. It is an image that lies beneath the center of the novel (structurally and thematically), an image so often a convention of Gothic narratives and so often a physical space where past and present, cause and effect, merge. For Edgar, the past, when he went to sleep in his own bed, is "too much in contradiction to the present," when he wakes in a dark cave. The irony is that in some ways past and present merge as Edgar moves

⁸² Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 268.

outward from the cave into an untamed space and reenacts the “civilizing” of Norwalk, killing Indian after Indian with increasingly brutal violence and conflating his parents’ deaths at the hands of Indians years earlier with his fears for the safety of his remaining family members. The physical space of the cave launches Edgar into the past of the present landscape and demands consideration of a deeper history than Edgar’s own, and consideration of the construction of that history and space.

In *Edgar Huntly*, the image of the cave or pit that collapses time and space stands in contradistinction to the event in which Europeans gained control of the land referred to in the novel as Norwalk through linear movement – through travel over the land’s surface over a precise amount of time. As numerous critics have pointed out, the historical event underlying the displacement of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians, and thus the events of *Edgar Huntly*, is the Walking Treaty or Walking Purchase of 1737. William Penn’s sons, finding their family deep in debt, spent years working with colonial administrators to try to purchase land in the Forks of the Delaware region of Pennsylvania from the local Indians. The Penn brothers failed to convince the Delaware to sell the land outright and so, sometime in 1735, a “deed” surfaced (or, very likely, was fabricated), indicating that the desired land had been bought and paid for by William Penn in 1686, but that the boundaries of that purchase had never been surveyed and, consequently, that the land had never been claimed. The deed stipulated that the area of land to change hands would begin at a designated spot and extend as far west as a man could walk in a day and a half. The Penns, or their affiliates, hired men “to determine the most advantageous route that could be read into their document’s language,” or, rather, into the gaps left within the document.⁸³ (Blank spaces were, it seems, left in the deed where there should have been specific

⁸³ Francis Jennings, “The Scandalous Indian Policy of William Penn’s Sons: Deeds and Documents of the Walking Purchase,” *Pennsylvania History*, 37 (January 1970), 31. See also Jennings, *The Ambiguous*

compass directions for the walk that would determine the boundaries of the claim.) When “by sundry means the Indians were brought to Philadelphia and persuaded to sign a confirmation of the 1686 document, blank spaces and all, and the Walk was walked, on September 19, 1737,” three men were hired to run along a prepared trail so that a great deal more land passed into European hands than the temporal stipulations of the deed should have allowed for.⁸⁴

The space into which Edgar unwittingly falls in a moment out of time, a moment without time, is this space delineated by a contrived narrative stipulating movement over a specific amount of time – a narrative based on a false deed that itself had gaps in it left to be filled in by the authors of the narrative. And just as Edgar fabricates a narrative to structure his ordeal in the space of “Norwalk,” this historical plotting of land involved twisting truths and filling in gaps to suit desires, with the end result of a clear boundedness, both to the land and to the tale of its past and of its acquisition, at least from the perspective of those in control of the dominant narrative.⁸⁵

If the image of the pit within the cave represents a rupture, not only in Edgar’s ability to narrate his own story without filling in or ignoring gaps, but also in the surface of the narratives told of the past and the safe boundedness of the past as past, it allegorizes the gaps that are filled in both in the exploration and settlement narratives that *Edgar Huntly* channels and in the histories built upon such narratives. If the enclosure of land demarcated and claimed by Europeans relies upon the narratives told about those claims, the physical hole in the ground

Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies From its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744 (New York: Norton, 1984), Chapter 17.

⁸⁴ Jennings, “The Scandalous Indian Policy,” 36. Not only was the deed deceptive, but the Delaware were also shown a map that depicted one area – an area where land had actually been sold to William Penn – but that was labeled, in English, as another area – the area that the Penns intended to now take.

⁸⁵ For discussion of the Walking Treaty in relation to *Edgar Huntly* see, for example, Krause and Sivils. For a discussion of mapping and defining the unmappable space of Norwalk see Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, & National Identity*, 197-203.

This bounded narrative did not go unchallenged. The types of attacks on settlements within the contested area described in *Edgar Huntly* did occur, and a series of treaty conferences were finally held between 1756 and 1758, but the results of the narrative of deception obviously held.

provides a reminder of the gaps under the surface of those narratives and, consequently, a reminder of questions concerning the legitimacy of that historical and geographical enclosure.

The motif of the pit, the precipice, the abyss, recurs throughout Brown's novels, of course, often serving as an indication of fear or crisis, as a metaphor for such, or, as Ed White has shown, as an indication of future catastrophe interrupted by a moment of perception, comprehension, or decision.⁸⁶ In an essay on *Wieland* White suggests that if, in that text, "pits suggest geography and geographical structures suggest history, the narrative pits signal nothing less than the interruption of narrative by "History" – not history cast as curious, discrete events...but history understood as the structural potential for human actions."⁸⁷

While pits may be associated with history as the "potential for human actions," serving as metaphors for potential "perennial eruptions" like the working-class uprisings that White discusses, throughout Brown's fiction they are also sites where past, present, and future merge in disorienting moments. They are places where the questions of unstable narration of past and present and of potential narrative deception that pervade Brown's fiction are broached. In *Wieland*, for example, Clara falls asleep in the "recess" of a wild "declivity" and dreams of being called toward the ledge of an abyss by her brother, only to wake and to hear a voice emanating from a "chasm" at her side. Past, present, and future merge as the voice mysteriously warns her to "Remember your father" (remember him now as he was) "and be faithful" (in the future).⁸⁸ Clara is plunged into a "state of uncertainty" by the voice – a voice both familiar and strange,

⁸⁶ Taking *Wieland* as an example, images of pits, gulfs, abysses, or precipices appear on at least eleven different occasions in that novel.

⁸⁷ Ed White, "Carwin the Peasant Rebel," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, Barnard, Kamrath, and Shapiro, eds., 55

⁸⁸ Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*, Jay Fliegelman ed. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 73.

whose authority cannot be verified and whose words are disorienting. The voice, which is of course that of the novel's bilquist Carwin, offers Clara fragments of narrative which she struggles to arrange coherently. Some of the novel's other characters, notably Clara's brother Wieland and their friend Pleyel, also create narratives from the fragments given to them by a mysterious voice. Wieland claims to have been instructed to murder his family, while Pleyel is convinced of Clara's ruin by fragments of a conversation that Carwin fabricates for just such a purpose. Like *Edgar Huntly*, *Wieland* is, then, very much concerned with questions of narration and knowledge, of what can be known and how, concerns that are occasionally associated with images of dark pits and looming gaps.

The same is true of Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*. In that novel, navigating through the city of Philadelphia is not merely about the confusions of its physical and social space during the chaos of a yellow fever epidemic, but is also about the confusions and pitfalls of narrative and of narrative deception. Narrated through a palimpsest of voices as Dr. Stevens relates the story that Arthur tells him, as Arthur in turn relates the story that Welbeck tells him, and so on, the novel is very much concerned with questions of truth, of whether one can "know" without seeing, and of whether one can "know" even after seeing. "Men must judge from what they see," reflects Arthur after learning of the "misconceptions" that his neighbors had formed of his character from the details available to their view. "They must build their conclusions on their knowledge," he continues, seeming to echo *Edgar Huntly*. "They examined what was exposed to their view, they grasped at what was placed within their reach," but, of course, the point is that the conclusions reached were incorrect because the "knowledge" those conclusions were built on was faulty.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (Aegypan Press, 2007), 261-262.

In *Arthur Mervyn*, narrative confusion and ruptures in knowledge are again frequently associated with pits and dark places. For example, just after Welbeck tells Arthur his story, a story that Arthur has good reason to distrust since Welbeck has been anything but forthright with him up to that point, Arthur finds himself in a dark cellar helping Welbeck to bury the body of the man he has just killed. When Arthur is left alone in the cellar with the body while Welbeck goes to get a shovel, the language of the scene echoes the moment when Edgar Huntly wakes in his own cave: “I had lost all distinct notions of my way. My motions were at random. All my labor was to shun obstructions and to advance whenever the vacuity would permit.”⁹⁰ Struggling to explain his situation, Arthur immediately concludes that Welbeck has left him trapped in the cellar, a conclusion that proves to be false. In narrating his experience for himself Arthur, like Edgar, bridges a gap incorrectly and finds himself doubly in the dark.

At other moments in *Arthur Mervyn*, conjectures, inferences, and the lack of stable knowledge that brings about such conjectures and inferences are explicitly aligned with the image of the pit. “I began to form conjectures as to the nature of the scheme to which my suppression of the truth was to be thus made subservient,” reflects Arthur after Welbeck instructs him not to tell Mrs. Wentworth anything about his past. “It seemed as if I were walking in the dark and might rush into snares or drop into pits before I was aware of my danger.”⁹¹ The very structure of the first sentence, in which clauses are subordinated, one after another being pushed below the others or made “subservient,” suggests the depths of an ever-deepening pit. It is as if the first sentence slowly carves out the pit of uncertainty into which the reader rapidly drops in the course of reading the second sentence.

⁹⁰ Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*, 89.

⁹¹ Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*, 58.

Here Arthur's conjectures are not able to carry him across the gap in understanding that he sees before him, but at other times the dangers of actually making such leaps are emphasized. "It may by no means be uncommon for men to *fashion* their conclusions in opposition to evidence and *probability*," Arthur thinks after surmising that the lady living in Welbeck's house as his "daughter" may be pregnant. "I saw the folly of precipitate inference and the injustice of my atrocious imputations," continues Arthur, "and acquired some degree of patience in my present state of uncertainty."⁹² In this instance an "inference," the leap across a gap in knowledge, is linked to geographical images of pits and precipices through the adjective "precipitate," suggesting not only haste and lack of adequate deliberation, but also the gap to be crossed and the danger of falling headlong into that space through a conclusion fashioned "in opposition to evidence and *probability*." The "precipitate inference," the narrative constructed to close gaps and tame the threat of uncertainty, is here indicated to be "folly," its danger lying in claims to certainty where there can be none. The spatial metaphor of the pit and the precipice, associated with narrative instability and gaps in knowledge or understanding whose closure is just as problematic as any other aspect of that gap (in part because what has been elided in order to fill the gap is always in danger of rising to the surface, or the bridge constructed of falling away) is thus central to Brown's concerns in many of his fictional writings, though the image takes on particular urgency in *Edgar Huntly*'s tale of travel and encounter.

Arranging Anew

Just as the image of the physical rupture associated with the dangers or difficulties of fabricating coherent narratives from disjointed fragments is not limited to *Edgar Huntly*, the pit or cave is not the only Gothic convention in that novel that serves as a metaphor for the traumas

⁹² Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*, 62-63. Emphasis in original.

of travel and challenges to the construction of settler colonial knowledge and space. These ideas are reinforced through another trope of enclosure within the novel, one connected to the notion that travel, encounter, and settler project in general are dependent on the ability of the colonial mind to structure “personal and experimental knowledge” into discrete small rooms, as the dedicatory poem to Wood’s *New England Prospect* suggests.⁹³ That trope circulates around the burying of Mrs. Lorimer’s manuscript, Edgar’s hiding of Waldegrave’s letters, and around the image of Clithero’s locked-box and Edgar’s secret cabinet, which become metaphors akin to “rooms” of knowledge within *Edgar Huntly*.

Gothic literature’s “locked-trunk” motif typically functions as a symbol of enigma, of the withholding of information that will prove a key to a mystery or problem. As W.M. Verhoeven notes, Brown plays with this convention in *Edgar Huntly* in that none of these devices provide the reader with answers. Clithero’s chest, presented in a dramatic suspenseful scene that bridges a chapter break – that itself encompasses a structural gap in the narrative so that a specific bounded space exceeds narrative bounding – proves to contain nothing but uninteresting tools, while neither the manuscript nor the letters contain information that helps to unravel any of the mysteries circulating within the novel. And not only is there no knowledge to be gained from unlocking or unburying these items, there is also the suggestion that they cannot contain what may have been hidden away inside of them. As Verhoeven reflects in a comment on *Edgar Huntly* that could easily apply to the experience of colonial encounter more generally, “in the face of epistemological crisis and ontological indeterminacy, man invariably conceives of a box, puts a message in it, locks the box, throws away the key, and pretends to have forgotten the

⁹³ See Read, 1-2.

message.”⁹⁴ Here the knowledge placed within the box is not that which is to be retained, but that of contradictions to be locked away in order to preserve the clear, manageable knowledge by which lives are structured. Boxes in *Edgar Huntly* are empty, however. What has been hidden - gaps in understanding or knowledge - has escaped, threatening to contaminate what was bracketed off in order to create a livable narrative.⁹⁵

The “epistemological crisis and ontological indeterminacy” that Verhoeven writes of can, of course, be the experience of a single individual faced with a situation that challenges boundaries of knowledge in the present moment, as with Columbus’ “They could not understand me, nor I them” or Edgar’s need to narrate his way through a perplexing situation. But the need to “box in” indeterminacy is also felt on a broader scale – that of historical narration. To that end, one of Brown’s early Gothic moments occurs in “The Man at Home,” written in 1798, a collection of thirteen semi-linked sketches about a debtor hiding from the law in a washerwoman’s house. The debtor finds a locked trunk which, when eventually opened, proves to have a false bottom concealing a manuscript history of the American Revolution. Here the trunk contains what we are told is a coherent historical narrative, yet the narrative remains enigmatic since the debtor’s intentions to publish it are never carried out and the reader never reads it. Brown tantalizingly offers the existence of a tale that “will merit being ranked among historical monuments,” a tale whose “authenticity cannot well be denied” - a seemingly solid “room” of knowledge - yet still that knowledge is withheld and its very existence remains questionable, problematizing the notion that the past can be bounded and known in a discrete

⁹⁴ W.M. Verhoeven, “Opening the Text: The Locked-Trunk Motif in Late Eighteenth-Century British and American Gothic Fiction,” in *Exhibited by Candlelight: Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition*, Valeria Tinkler-Villani and Peter Davidson, eds. (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 216.

⁹⁵ For another reading of Brown’s cabinets in relation to issues of narrative and, specifically, historical narratives, see Emerson, 141-145.

narrative form.⁹⁶ In the image of the unseen “true” history within the trunk lies a connection between Gothic tropes of enclosure, the plotting of settler colonial spaces and land claims, the epistemological crisis of the travel narrative whose gaps are filled in to present a narratable story, and Brown’s own writings on the relationship between fiction and history.

While Brown questions the authenticity of historical evidence in his historiographical essays, most of his energy in these writings is devoted to consideration of the interpretation of historical evidence. At times he privileges the view of the observer who empirically records appearances and the work of the senses (in seeming opposition to the distrust of the senses that pervades his novels), yet interpretation of observation is always the realm of probability and contingency, undermining the firm authority of any observation. For example, in “The Difference between History and Romance” he writes: “Curiosity is not content with noting and recording the *actions* of men. It likewise seeks to know the *motives* by which the agent is impelled to the performance of these actions; but motives are modifications of thought which cannot be subjected to the senses. They cannot be certainly known. They are merely topics of

⁹⁶ Charles Brockden Brown, “The Man at Home,” in *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings*, Harry R. Warfel, ed. (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943), 69.

See Yvette Piggush, “Fancy History: John Fanning Watson’s Relic Box,” *CommonPlace*, vol. 10, no. 1, October 2009, for discussion of a relic box from early nineteenth-century Philadelphia said to be made from elm wood from Penn’s Treaty elm, walnut trees from near Independence Hall, and mahogany from the house where Columbus lived in St. Domingo. As Piggush’s reading of Watson’s history box points out, the box “occupies a border between the art of cultivating the memory to store ideas in the ‘rooms’ of the mind’s metaphorical ‘house’ and the empirical, evidence-based social science of history.” It “transforms the classical art of training the memory to function like a house with rooms for storing ideas into a physical box with compartments for holding evidence” and at the same time presents discontinuous moments through objects, challenging “the dominance of narrative in the production of historical knowledge.” This tradition of the relic, curio, or history box is resonates with the spatial, temporal, and epistemological questions surrounding boxes in *Edgar Huntly*, and the spatial, temporal complications to linear narrative of “The Man at Home” and *Edgar Huntly*’s fragmented structures – each chapter or sketch drawer-like, a separate part of a larger whole.

conjecture.”⁹⁷ Earlier in the same essay, Brown emphasizes the creative work involved in such conjecturing:

Curiosity is not satisfied with viewing facts in their disconnected state and natural order, but is prone to arrange them anew, and to deviate from present and sensible objects, into speculations on the past or future; it is eager to infer from the present state of things, their former or future condition. The observer or experimentalist, therefore, who carefully watches, and faithfully enumerates the appearances which occur, may claim the appellation of historian. He who adorns these appearances with cause and effect, and traces resemblances between the past, distant, and future, with the present, performs a different part. He is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore a romancer.⁹⁸

The work of tracing “resemblances” and thereby of closing spaces between events falls to the romancer, whose dealings are in “probabilities” that must be adhered to. (As Arthur Mervyn warns, “It may by no means be uncommon for men to *fashion* their conclusions in opposition to evidence and *probability*.”)

This language of probability also appears in Brown’s earlier essay “Walstein’s School of History”: “Though no one can state the motives from which any action has flowed, he may enumerate motives from which it is quite certain, that the action did *not* flow.”⁹⁹ With this imaginative exercise Brown prefigures more contemporary epistemological theorizations such as “singular causal imputation,” described most clearly by Max Weber in “Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences.” This logic, as Paul Ricoeur summarizes it, “consists essentially of the constructing by our imagination of a different course of events, then of weighing the probable consequences of this unreal course of events, and, finally, in comparing these consequences with the real course of events.”¹⁰⁰ Imagining a counterhistory allows one to ascertain, as Brown suggests, “that the action did *not* flow” from certain causes and has become

⁹⁷ Brown, “The Difference between History and Romance,” 252. This statement has clear relevance to Edgar’s pursuit of the truth about Clithero.

⁹⁸ Brown, “The Difference between History and Romance,” 251.

⁹⁹ Brown, “Walstein’s School of History,” 337.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 1, 183.

recognized as a way in which imaginative narration is involved in actively constructing historical knowledge – knowledge that is always, Brown states, comprised of a series of connections that cannot be ascertained with certainty. Cause and effect remain flexible probabilities, and to solidify a particular relationship between them is to perform the work of emplotment, creating a narrative by bounding off and giving credence to some possibilities while discarding others, much as Edgar Huntly sees his own gun in the possession of the Indians he encounters and concludes that the Huntly farm must have been raided and his family massacred.

This language of conjecture, inference, and speculation – of creating narrative from “facts in their disconnected state and natural order” – is notably spatial, as facts are “arranged anew” and as connections between cause and effect are forged where previously there was only “disconnection.” Indeed, these ideas of spatial arrangement appear throughout Brown’s writings on history. In “The Difference between History and Romance” Brown clarifies his position by drawing on an image of the heavens: “An historian will form catalogues of stars, and mark their positions at given times. A romancer will arrange them in *clusters* and dispose them in *strata*, and inform you by what influences the orbs have been drawn into sociable knots and circles.”¹⁰¹ Here, the relationships between individual stars, between singular observations, are described not linearly, but in three-dimensions, dimensions that become notably geographical and geological with the introduction of the idea of “strata.” The spaces between the stars are filled with the assertion of relationships to other points.

On other occasions the spatial metaphor is one of building a structure. “The merit of him who drags stones together, must not be depreciated,” Brown writes of the “historian,” “but must not be compared with him [the romancer] who hews these stones into just proportions, and piles

¹⁰¹ Brown, “The Difference between History and Romance,” 252.

them up into convenient and magnificent fabrics.”¹⁰² And in a June 1799 review of *The History of Pennsylvania* (by Brown’s former schoolteacher Robert Proud) Brown writes: “To bring together the stones and rafters that are to constitute the building is little more than manual labour. The intelligence that guides us to the holes and corners where the crude materials are deposited, and enables us to drag them together into one heap, is not great. Mr. Proud...has distinguished and culled out those blocks and beams that were useful to his purpose, and not only collected them together, but placed them in the order in which they will be successively required by the builder.”¹⁰³ Here, the “crude materials” of history are, notably, deposited in cave-like “holes and corners,” hidden away and needing to be excavated, to be dragged together, and then, finally, arranged in a manner that creates coherence – a manner that forges relationships between the disparate parts in such a way that the gaps between parts are not merely closed, but closed in order to create a usable structure.

The image of structures of history forged by closing gaps between disparate “crude materials” recalls the image of the four walls of Wood’s “rooms of knowledge” crafted to contain knowledge of the colonial scene, of the walls of the room out of which Edgar sleepwalks, and of the geographical boundaries fixed by runners hired by William Penn’s sons. Enclosed spaces of bounded, coherent narratives are created by bridging gaps in understanding through conjecture and probability, by dragging disparate “crude materials” together. Though Brown does not acknowledge it in these historiographical essays, his novels make it clear that these structures of history and of narrative are in danger of collapsing, however. They can, ultimately,

¹⁰² Brown, “The Difference between History and Romance,” 253.

¹⁰³ Charles Brockden Brown, “Art. XII. [Review of] *The History of Pennsylvania, in North-America, from the Original Institution and Settlement of that Province, &c. in 1681, till after the year 1742; with an Introduction, respecting the Life of William Penn, and the Society of Quakers; with the Rise of the Neighbouring Colonies, &c. &c. &c.* By Robert Proud. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 1028, Philadelphia Z. Poulson, Jun. 1798,” *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (Jun. 1799, Vol. 1, Iss. 3), 217.

be shown to be empty, like boxes in *Edgar Huntly* in which knowledge cannot be held and in which contradictions cannot be repressed. The bottom can fall out of these spaces. The blackness of the pit within the cave can not only bring past and present together in a singular eruption of past into present, but can signal the persistent disjunctures poking through the walls of the structures of settler histories. (Columbus' "Nevertheless, I understood them to say" is, after all, rather weak cement between the admission, "I did not understand them" and the assertion, "I understood them perfectly.")

There is no doubt that Brown saw great potential and promise in the constructive work of the historical romancer. Whereas Godwin turned away from the contingencies of romance and back to "history" as annal-like observation, many of the reviews of historical writings attributed to Brown contain critiques of the disconnected nature of those writings: "We wish, indeed, that Dr. T. had been more attentive to arrangement and style. He has, in many instances, thrown together important materials in a method scarcely more digested than meager annals," Brown quips in an April 1799 review of *A complete History of Connecticut* by Benjamin Trumbull.¹⁰⁴ "We are not to look, in this work, for any traces of the genuine historian. The author has taken the path of the humble, honest, and industrious compiler," is a veiled critique embedded in the review of Proud's history of Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁵ And in "Walstein's School of History" Brown makes it clear that creatively closing gaps in historical knowledge by arranging and "adorning," by crafting a relationship between cause and effect, can be a positive thing. The methodology of

¹⁰⁴ Charles Brockden Brown, "Art. I. [Review of] *A complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Emigration of its first Planters from England in 1630, to 1713*. By Benjamin Trumbull, D.D. Vol. I. 8vo. 2 dollars & 25 cents. Hudson and Goodwin. Hartford," *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (April 1799, Vol. 1, Iss. 1), 45.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Brockden Brown, "Art. XII. [Review of] *The History of Pennsylvania, in North-America, from the Original Institution and Settlement of that Province, &c. in 1681, till after the year 1742; with an Introduction, respecting the Life of William Penn, and the Society of Quakers; with the Rise of the Neighbouring Colonies, &c. &c. &c.* By Robert Proud. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 1028, Philadelphia Z. Poulson, Jun. 1798," 216.

the historical writings of Walstein and his pupil Engels is to “exhibit, in an eloquent narration, a model of right conduct.” According to these two fictional scholars, “the narration of public events, with a certain licence of invention, was the most efficacious of moral instruments.”¹⁰⁶ Historical incidents are arranged for didactic purposes, for “moral benefit.”

Some critics have focused on this moral valence of historical narrative within Brown’s writings since his authorial persona explicitly intends his novels to have moral functions. (The prefaces to many of Brown’s novels, as well as the endings of some, like *Wieland*, express a hope - quite standard at the time - that the work will better its readers in some way.) The moral regarding the romancer’s historical process embedded within Brown’s fiction certainly might be, as Amanda Emerson indicates, that “curiosity and invention must remain under the dominion of reason,” and that “excesses of possibility” must be reigned in when positing relationships between cause and effect in order to construct narratives.¹⁰⁷ Brown does not deny the possibility of “knowing” in all senses, instead acknowledging the contingencies and instability of (historical) narrative even while finding properly executed (historical) narratives to be uplifting and “truthful.” Yet the language of speculation, probability, and conjecture in his historiographical essays cannot fail to raise persistent questions about “truth” when considering these writings alongside of Brown’s fictional works in which characters struggle to discipline their invention and imagination. While Brown may see a moral scope for the fictional writer and the historical romancer, the most salient point remains his recognition of the mutability of stories about the past and the relativity involved in the idea that if a historical narrative exhibits a “moral truth,” it was constructed to do so.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, “Walstein’s School of History, Part II,” *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (Sep-Dec 1799. Vol. 1, Iss. 6), 408, 407.

¹⁰⁷ Emerson, 146.

This contradiction between a stated faith in uplifting, moral historiography as practiced by Brown's fictional scholar Walstein and Brown's seeming skepticism about such exemplary historiography in many of his other writings is clear in the juxtaposition between Walstein's "Life of Cicero" and Brown's own essay "Death of Cicero: A Fragment." As Oliver Scheiding suggests, Brown's tale, an account of the final hours of Cicero's life and of his death written from the point of view of a freed slave, Tiro, demonstrates, through the narrator's conflicted status as both unreliable eyewitness and as historian "that historiography's claim to function as *magistra vitae* relies upon the retrospective imposition of culturally accepted plot-structures which the historian builds into his narrative in order to make sense of his data."¹⁰⁸ Tiro offers his own understanding of what he saw, then considers what might have happened. He practices a kind of "singular causal imputation," and finally emplots the events he describes into a larger narrative of the Roman Empire. The result is a narrative (notably appended to the second edition of *Edgar Huntly*) that "expounds on the collision between historical interpretation and the alleged factuality already found in historical data" and that seems to offer a direct counter-example to the fictional Walstein's historiographical message. Here Brown seems to parody Walstein's moral, didactic history more than he upholds it.¹⁰⁹

Emerson concludes that Brown's "fictitious histories suggest that if imagination is to make the nation whole by telling new truths about the past, it will require narrators with discretion and sincerity as well as discipline and judgment."¹¹⁰ It seems important, however, that Brown's novels remain skeptical of the possibility of such "discretion and sincerity" and,

¹⁰⁸ Oliver Scheiding, "'Plena exemplorum est historia': Rewriting Exemplary History in Charles Brockden Brown's 'Death of Cicero,'" in *Re-visioning the Past: Historical Self-Reflexivity in American Short Fiction*, Bernd Engler and Oliver Scheiding, Eds. (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1998), 44.

¹⁰⁹ Scheiding, 49.

¹¹⁰ Emerson, 146.

following Robert Levine, to disrupt the critical desire to give shape and structure to literary history by reading texts like Brown's predominantly through narratives of literary nationalism and nation-making.¹¹¹ If Brown's historiographical moral concerns the need for qualities of "discretion and sincerity" in recording and narrating the past, we are not offered a model of such a disciplined historical narrator. Instead, "the ultimate significance of Brown's fiction lies," as Verhoeven has written, "in his fictional representation of the impossibility of absolute certainty."¹¹² As Verhoeven writes on another occasion, "Brown's Gothicism not only signals – in Foucault's phrase – the discontinuity of traditional historical discourse, but actively seeks to

¹¹¹ Levine seeks to upset the neat narratives of history, of literature, and of the history of literature that have been constructed, "recovering a sense of the provisional and contested nature of American literary nationalism" (*Dislocating Race and Nation*, 1). Levine's stated focus is on the "*unknowingness* that writers convey in their writings, an unknowingness that often takes expression as a resistance to cultural certainties and... a wise bafflement about the meanings, trajectories, and plots of the unfolding narratives of history" (2). The story of literary nationalism is, according to Levine, problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that "the historical premises of such a story are invariably anachronistic, the result of the needs, interpretive models, and desires of a relatively small number of literary nationalists being imposed retrospectively and all too neatly on literary debates that were much messier at the time than subsequent literary critics have generally allowed" (3). The parallels between the historical skepticism that Brown engages in and the skepticism of literary histories that Levine encourages are clear, and the two are intertwined. The notion of the anachronism also has significant relevance in terms of the temporal and spatial gaps of and within fiction characterized by the gothic aesthetic.

¹¹² Verhoeven, "This blissful period of intellectual liberty," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, 29. Significantly, Brown's own biography and bibliography remains open-ended so that his life's-work not only concerned "the impossibility of absolute certainty," but exhibits that impossibility itself. Paul Allen, who was assigned to write the official biography of Brown following his death never completed that work, which was taken up by William Dunlop, who eventually published his own biography of Brown, so that the history of Brown's own life became a kind of fragmented, serialized production. In their introduction to Allen's work, Hemenway and Katz comment, "There are two Charles Brockden Browns: one is Allen's, the other Dunlop's, and they differ almost consistently in the two biographies" (xxxiv). (The quote that begins this chapter, again, comes from Allen's biography.) Similarly, precise details of Brown's writings remain subject to question. As Philip Barnard acknowledges in the introduction to the most complete listing of Brown's works in existence, "Brown's extensive anonymous periodical publications and editorial work on three magazines filled with his own writing make it impossible to pretend to definitive attribution for many items; thus a comprehensive Brown bibliography necessarily remains open to change" ("A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of Charles Brockden Brown, 1783-1822," from *The Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition*, www.brockdenbrown.ucf.edu. Philip Barnard and Mark Kamrath, eds. Updated 11/21/2008. Accessed 12/06/08, 3).

undermine, or dismantle, the metaphysical tradition of logocentrism and historical cognition.”¹¹³

This is true of Brown’s novels in general, but in *Edgar Huntly* this uncertainty surfaces in relation to narration of disorienting experiences of travel, encounter, and settlement, to the “undermining” power of images of pits and caves that reflect epistemological gaps, and in relation to understanding of events that have happened in the recent or distant past. As Edgar comments about the narrative he had constructed in which Clithero murdered Waldegrave, “Would not any one, from similar appearances, have drawn similar conclusions? Or is there a criterion by which truth can always be distinguished?”¹¹⁴

Traveling Through Time

Throughout Brown’s writings on history, as throughout *Edgar Huntly*, there is an underlying awareness of the construction of narrative through conjecture and “precipitate inference.” There is, therefore, a fundamental connection between Edgar the explorer narrating the unfamiliar and the individual who narrates the past. Both fill in gaps in understanding in order to render the unfamiliar familiar – in order to craft a narrative. Indeed, one might rely on the crafted narration or the image of the colonial explorer in order to tell a story of the past that offers a sense of larger meaning and purpose as Barlow did in *The Columbiad*. We travel through time, as well as through space, Brown points out, in narratives of our own construction.

In *Edgar Huntly*, narrative moves like the emptying out of the locked-trunk ensure that the reader experiences the epistemological disjuncture that the novel illustrates in the process of reading. For the reader, knowledge itself is destabilized in a way that haunts early American travel narratives and, according to Brown, American historical narratives in general. As the

¹¹³ Verhoeven, “Opening the Text,” 218.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, 86.

dichotomies of self and other that might seem to constitute the colonial mindset fall apart in the face of settler experiences, and as gaps in understanding fleetingly manifest themselves and are ignored, narratives of travel and subsequent attempts at settlement become unstable acts of imagination. So too are the histories built on these experiences acts of imagination for Brown, dealing with “truth,” but ultimately not reducible to truth. They are structures, pieced together by the imaginative acts of the “romantic historian,” that create order from disorder through conjecture and probability. In the image of the pit that is the inverse of such structural metaphors, that collapses time and space, and that brings the past into the present, Brown finds a geographic, topographic metaphor that captures problems of bracketing off land and knowledge circulated about that land and its past. He melds the disconnect of the gothic aesthetic with the crisis of travel, while raising questions about the possibility of knowing the past and present so frequently taken up in his writings. Brown’s own youthful plan for historical epics on American explorers probably went unrealized. Instead, in *Edgar Huntly* he crafts a tale that destabilizes travel and settlement as it places at its center questions about historical knowledge that, like early travel narratives, hover around gaps and ruptures filled in, yet threatening to re-open.

Chapter Three:
The Mississippi's Fluid Forms:
Spaces of Historical Narration in Lewis and Clark's *Journals*,
Black Hawk's *Autobiography* and Melville's *The Confidence-Man*

Charles Brockden Brown's awareness of the constructed nature of historical narrative made him critical of narratives of providential progress and American exceptionalism. Yet he was not necessarily critical of geographic expansion. Two pamphlets written by Brown and published in 1803 essentially argue in favor of American possession of the Louisiana Territory. These pamphlets have led some scholars to conclude that Brown became more conservative over time - that the radical questioning embedded in his early writings, his wariness of narratives of progress - was subsumed within an expansionist ethos that looked eagerly toward the Mississippi River. Both pamphlets, however, use a narrative persona that puts complicating layers between Brown's voice and the words on the page. It is difficult to determine where the speaker ends and Brown begins, and thus difficult to narrate a story about Brown's opinions regarding the Louisiana Purchase. The polyvocality of the pamphlets make the boundaries of Brown's claims contentious, much like the spatial boundaries being debated within them. The past cannot be easily accessed here. Brown forces us to conjecture and interpret; he forces us to repeatedly "arrange anew."¹

¹ Robert Levine and Mark Kamrath have both argued "for understanding Brown's Louisiana materials as eschewing any boisterous rhetoric of American destiny, providential design, or exceptionalism," despite their apparent expansionist rhetoric (Kamrath, *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown*, 188). See Kamrath, 181-196 for an extended discussion of Brown and the Louisiana Purchase. In his essay on the subject Levine concludes, "Paradoxically, Brown pursues his nationalist ends in the Louisiana pamphlets through an anti-expansionist expansionism that aspires to bring about national unity, coherence, purpose, and self-defense. These are simultaneously anxious and reflective texts, texts that both critique and seek to sustain the nation" ("Race and Nation in Brown's Louisiana Writings," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro, eds., 350). The two pamphlets referred to are *Address to the Government of the United*

The instability of stories told about the Western territories that would eventually become *Symzonia*'s innumerable "half-made States" – that would become the state of Illinois, to which Dirk Peters retreats at the end of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* – brings the fluidity of a text like *Pym* into the U.S. interior or, rather, shows that fluidity to exist there as well. As *Pym*, like *Edgar Huntly*, destabilizes the process of narrating the past through images of topographical rupture and the encounters that take place within and around those ruptures, the polyvocal Mississippi narratives examined in this chapter unsettle notions of historical, providential progress as they work against geographical enclosure. Narratives about movement that are themselves always in movement, Lewis and Clark's *Journals*, Black Hawk's *Autobiography*, and Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* all complicate narrative and geographical emplotment as the Mississippi Valley was "settled," was brought into, and then became a symbol of, the nation.

The Mississippi River appears as a border in conventional accounts of the United States' march across the landscape of North America, marking a line in a spatial and temporal story of progress structured, in part, by the forcible displacement of indigenous peoples. The goal of early nineteenth-century Indian policy was, as Thomas Jefferson put it in an 1803 letter to the Governor of Indiana Territory William Henry Harrison, that "settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States, or remove beyond the Mississippi."² Jefferson's story of progress makes the land "beyond the Mississippi" a space outside of the growing American nation.

States, on the Cession of Louisiana to the French (January 1803) and *Monroe's Embassy, or the Conduct of the Government, in Relation to Our Claims to the Navigation of the Mississippi* (March 3, 1803).

² Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1118.

The river had, in fact, been established as the western border of the United States in 1783 when a peace treaty with Britain ended the War of Independence. In 1787, the year in which Brown's fictional Edgar Huntly woke to find himself in a space that collapsed the past and present of a contested territory, Congress passed legislation establishing the precedent for westward expansion toward the Mississippi. The Northwest Ordinance created the Northwest Territory and stipulated that expansion would proceed toward the river through the admission of new states rather than the expansion of existing ones.

Jefferson himself had planted the seeds of the Northwest Ordinance in 1784 when he proposed a scheme that would divide the area between the Appalachians and the Mississippi into fourteen states composed of ten mile square "hundreds." In a contemporary rendering these states are represented as cleanly drawn squares and rectangles with the North-South gash of the Mississippi as their western border (See Figure 3.1). Jefferson planned to give the new states names like "Metropotamia" and "Pelisipia," names that indicate a desire to emplot the space and history of America in relation to past European empires. The Mississippi and its tributaries are the notably disorderly features on this map, twisted veins that stand in distinct opposition to the ruler straight lines of the proposed state borders. Yet those veins are harnessed as boundaries, incorporated into the organizational logic of the whole as Jefferson worked to create order out of disorder, disciplining a nascent national space and enforcing a national narrative.

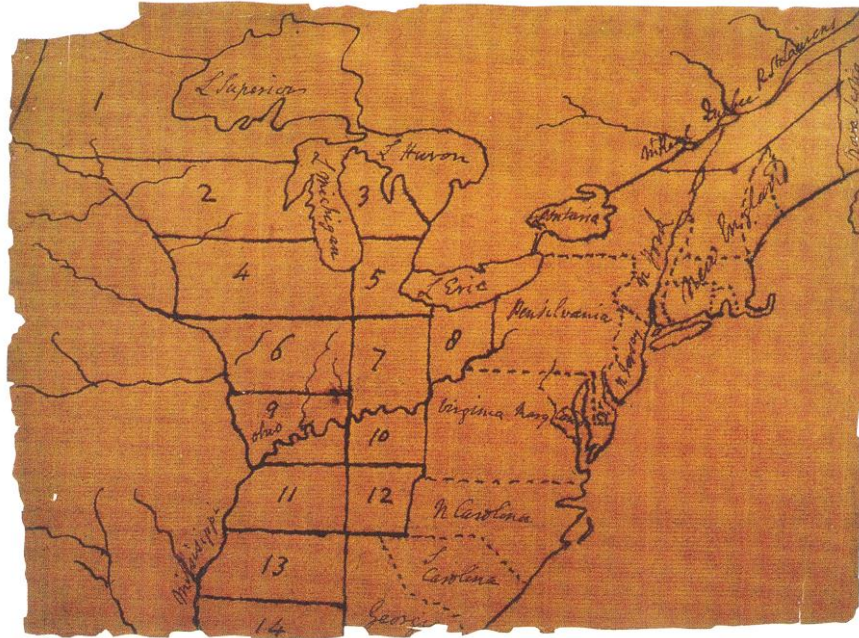


Figure 3.1: A map of the United States east of the Mississippi River...
by David Hartley, 1784.
(William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan)

Of course, the Mississippi did not long remain the terminus of America's officially sanctioned imperial mission. It was never a line beyond which Indians could safely exist. Even in 1803 as Jefferson wrote to Harrison he also wrote to Meriwether Lewis, providing detailed instructions for exploring and mapping the area between the Mississippi and the Pacific Northwest. As Euro-American settlement reached the Mississippi, it crossed it, and in the next decades the river began to occupy another place in stories of American progress and exceptionalism. It became a symbol of natural, national unity.³

³ See Rich Heyman, "Locating the Mississippi: Landscape, Nature, and National Territoriality at the Mississippi Headwaters," *American Quarterly*, June 2010, Vol. 62, No. 2, 303-333 for a recent discussion of the constructed nature of this "natural" symbol. For a reading of the Mississippi as a space that "complicated the dominant symbolism of continental settlement in the nineteenth-century" see Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 2. LeMenager's discussion hinges on the river as a passageway that is part of a commercial version of Manifest Destiny involving "apparently landless places like deserts, oceans, and rivers" that she investigates as heterotopias, as sites challenging hegemonic spatial representations, leading to historical revisionist projects (2 and 4). Recent book length studies of the Mississippi or of Mississippi regions include: Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams*:

“The shores of the Mississippi, and its tributary streams, present to the world a singular and most enchanting picture -- one which future ages will contemplate with wonder and delight,” writes James Hall in the Introduction to an 1828 collection, *Letters from the West*, a series of sketches loosely based on his 1820 trip from Pittsburgh to Shawneetown, Illinois on the Ohio River:

“The celerity with which the soil has been peopled, and the harmony which has prevailed in the erection of their governments, have no parallel in history, and seem to be the effect of magic, rather than of human agency... It remained for us to exhibit to the world the novel spectacle of a people, coming from various nations, and differing in language, politics, and religion, sitting down quietly together, erecting states, forming constitutions, and enacting laws, without bloodshed or dissension. Our curiosity is excited to know what powerful attraction has drawn these multitudes from their native plains, and why, like bees, they swarm as it were to the same bough. Nor is it less interesting to inquire by what process such heterogeneous particles have become united, and to observe the effect of so extraordinary a combination.”⁴

Here, Hall’s movement down the Ohio toward the Mississippi provides an occasion to enact the fiction of America’s plural oneness as rivers – like people, like bees – “swarm...to the same bough,” a fiction made both a linear “process” and somehow instantaneous - magical. Hall continues, “When we were told of the *Great Valley*, whose noble rivers, stretching in every direction from the distant mountains, poured their waters into the bosom of the *Father of Streams*; and of the rich bottoms, extensive prairies, and gigantic forests of the West, we could smile at what we believed to be simple exaggeration.”⁵ Now, Hall implies, America inhabits that Eden. Movement westward and the American story of providential progress become fused.

Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁴ James Hall, *Letters from the West; Containing Sketches of Scenery, Manners, and Customs; and Anecdotes Connected with First Settlements of the Western Sections of the United States* (London: Colburn, 1828), 6-7; 7-8. Many of these sketches were first published in the *Portfolio* (Philadelphia). The London collection was, apparently, published without Hall’s knowledge or consent.

⁵ Hall, 12.

This narrative of the Mississippi as a physical and temporal border within a story of national development or as a metaphor for America's successful plural unity was not without its complications, however. Evidence of previous "Mound-Builder" civilizations throughout the Mississippi Valley obsessed nineteenth-century "antiquarians" and the public alike, leading to questions about the uniqueness and longevity of America's empire. The space of the Mississippi would be harnessed to critique the divisive horrors of slavery. And, of course, Euro-American trappers had already been moving up and down the Mississippi for well over a century. The river provided a connection to a larger world of global movements – a world that saw European traders already established in the Northwest when Lewis and Clark arrived at the Pacific over land. The line of the Mississippi as one demarcating spatial and temporal progress or national unity becomes, then, a fractured site of contention.

Few texts from the first decades of the nineteenth century highlight the fluidity of the boundary of the Mississippi – geographically and narratively – as much as the *Life of MA-KA-TAI-ME-SHE-KIA-KIAK or Black Hawk...Dictated By Himself* (1833), now commonly known simply as *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* and referred to here as the *Life*. The narrative is purportedly dictated through an interpreter, written by an editor, and published as the story of an individual and as a "general history" of what became known as the Black Hawk War, a fifteen-week conflict between the Sauk and the American Army in 1832. At the heart of the narrative is a battle for land as Black Hawk's people cross and re-cross the Mississippi, resisting displacement from their village, Saukenuk, at the confluence of the Rock and Mississippi Rivers in Illinois. Even more fundamentally, the narrative marks and enacts fractures between differing conceptions of narrating past and present and between differing conceptions of space and time.

As such, it draws attention to wider problems of historical narration and resists easy incorporation into literary and historical master narratives through its generic and formal instability. The potential deception of lines that at once bound space and intersect with lines of written words bounding meaning are central to the narrative's conflicts, converging in critiques of treaties and in brief accounts of meetings with historical figures, like the western traveler, circuit judge, one-term Illinois state treasurer, writer, and historian Judge James Hall.

Hall is also taken up in another fluid Mississippi narrative highlighting the artifice that can be involved in the emplotment of space and narrative into easily recognizable forms. The "Indian-hating" portions of Herman Melville's 1857 *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* are based on Hall's writings; they use him as a type with which to ironically critique historical typologies linked to the delineation of spatial boundaries within the novel. Taking up the Mississippi as a symbol of (false) unity, as a historical, narrative trope exemplified in the Introduction to Hall's *Letters from the West* quoted above, Melville uses its watery space to undermine a master narrative of progress that fuses the construction of geographical boundaries with a sense of clarity regarding America's past, present, and future.

These two texts are themselves, then, engaged in a conversation about intersections between efforts to enclose physical space and to give shape to historical time through linear narratives in the first half of the nineteenth century. They position themselves against a kind of "emplotment" that, in Melville's novel at least, becomes exemplified by Hall's work to produce a knowable past and an exceptional future for the American West. Moving down and across the Mississippi (and in Black Hawk's case across the Ohio and Rock Rivers as well), Black Hawk's narrative and Melville's novel resist stability through a geographical and narrative fluidity, a

movement that counters Hall's sketches of the Ohio, that counters his catalogues of facts and statistics.

Hall's work is certainly not without internal tensions. It does not present a completely uniform, untroubled vision of expansion.⁶ Yet Hall stands at the confluence of these two Mississippi narratives as a figure of the notion that a representation of events (past or present) that presumes to be unified, conventional, and knowable will ultimately deceive. In Black Hawk's *Life* he becomes associated with the lines of writing that enclose land and lives in discrete frames, while in *The Confidence-Man* he is caricatured through a repetitious, empty orality that comes to mimic the repetition of his words in print. He emerges as a type with which to critique historical typology that "emplots" histories and territories.

Of course, the *Life*'s engagement with the space of the Mississippi and its brief mention of Hall stem from historical circumstances. The text is, after all, an autobiography of sorts, however complicated. Melville's text is, on the other hand, fictional, yet like so much antebellum fiction it blurs the line between truth and fiction, intentionally and explicitly. Both texts, then, complicate whatever generic and formal boundaries we might be inclined to impose upon them. Both engage with the Mississippi as a spatial reality and a narrative trope or type that becomes part of a linear narrative of progress westward into a glorious national future. Both destabilize that trope, depicting the line of the "Father of Streams" not as a physical or temporal marker of westward expansion or a symbol of linear progress, but as a flowing space of

⁶ Edward Watt's "Introduction" to a recent collection of Hall's stories admits that Hall worked within standard narrative conventions, but also emphasizes his depiction of a plural West, his progressive questioning of colonialist assumptions, his challenging of "the purported inevitability of the seamless absorption of the region into the nation," and his chronicling of "the human, cultural, and moral costs incurred by American empire building," (*"The Indian Hater" and Other Stories, by James Hall*, ed. Edward Watts (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2009), xix-xx). Such a sympathetic reading might overstate Hall's progressive nature, but acknowledging the unsettled complications of texts by writers like Hall, and of settler identities more generally, is central to an approach to settlement studies that grapples with the "simultaneity" of settlement.

uncertainty, of multiplicity, misunderstanding, and distrust. Countering the unified, providential time and space of Hall's "singular and most enchanting picture" of an America seemingly settled by "magic," these texts harness the space of the river to highlight the human agency involved in settlement and the agency involved in crafting narratives that make settlement seem inevitable and instantaneous.

This chapter itself takes up the fluid form of the river, first moving west from St. Louis on the Missouri with Lewis and Clark and into geographical and narrative representation challenged by indigenous ways of knowing space and the past, and then moving back east to Black Hawk and the Mississippi. Like Lewis and Clark's journals and maps, Black Hawk's *Life* appears as a text of incommensurabilities, of divergent narratives, that embodies emplotment into a master narrative and deconstructs that process at the same time. As the *Life* captures tensions in understandings of space and uses of narrative in the construction of American history, *The Confidence-Man* becomes a text that, in its fragmented form and disconcerting irony, uses a tale of surreal movement and travel to comment on issues of historical emplotment. The "Indian-hating" sections of the novel take up (in part through Hall) tensions regarding the crafting and repetition of master narratives that lie beneath Black Hawk's text. In this sense the "Indian-hating" chapters, often read in terms of the way they reinforce violence against native peoples become, paradoxically, a critique of the potential violence of Euro-American historical narration. Rather than serving as a border or symbol of territorial or national unity, then, these texts treat the Mississippi as a fluid gap – a geographic metaphor of ruptures in spatial and narrative emplotment.

“In the Loss of Yourself”

By all accounts it was cloudy and rainy on May 14, 1804 when William Clark set out from Camp Dubois with the Corps of Discovery, starting up the Missouri River and then waiting for Meriwether Lewis to join them from nearly St. Louis. The expedition had left from Pittsburgh in August of the previous year, traveling down the Ohio River as James Hall would seventeen years later. The men wintered near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri before beginning their trip up the Mississippi’s major western tributary.

Lewis and Clark’s journey was one fueled by curiosity, scientific inquiry, and political, territorial motivations. The Louisiana Purchase, completed in April 1803, made the expedition (already underway before Lewis and the Corps learned of the treaty signed in Paris) even more important. Shortly after the expedition’s return to the eastern United States the journey’s legacy began to solidify through the publication of expedition narratives, authorized and unauthorized. The story of Lewis and Clark’s trip eventually became a lynchpin in the progressivist narrative of nineteenth-century westward expansion, though this did not occur until the early twentieth-century.⁷ In recent years the journey received renewed attention as a flurry of books were published on the occasion of its bicentennial, solidifying its place in the national master narrative. Less acknowledged than the tale of persistence and discovery that has become associated with the names Lewis and Clark are the moments when their narrative collapses in unnarratable, unnarrated gaps that show controlled westward expansion to have been more fraught and fragile than much of American history would have us believe. We know that it was

⁷ Other explorers (such as Alexander von Humboldt) were better known and more celebrated during the nineteenth century itself, another indication of the ways that histories are revised and constructed. (See Michael F. Robinson, “Why We Need a New History of Exploration,” *Common-Place*, vol. 10, no.1, October 2009 for a recent juxtaposition of the influence of Lewis and Clark and Humboldt in the nineteenth century.)

cloudy and rainy on May 14, 1804, but not all details of the infamous expedition are so clearly documented or knowable.

Clear documentation was precisely what Jefferson had ordered the expedition to collect. His instructions to Lewis outlined in great detail the kinds of information that the Corps was to “discover” and stipulated, “Your observations are to be taken with great pains & accuracy, to be entered distinctly, & intelligibly for others as well as yourself.”⁸ Even in addressing the potential loss of life associated with the expedition, Jefferson’s focus was on the record that stood to be lost: “in the loss of yourselves, we should lose also the information you will have acquired.”⁹ Jefferson’s phrasing now seems ironic in light of what followed. The President’s instructions about recording and plotting the narrative and geography of the journey were clear, and numerous members of the expedition kept the journals that have helped to make it so famous. Yet many parts of those journals are sketchy at best, riddled with gaps and silences. As the men lost themselves, Jefferson did indeed lose portions of information about the trip.

Historians have often attributed the journals’ silences to the physical hardships of the journey. It is difficult to draw maps and write lengthy journal entries after long days of traveling upriver (though the men frequently did just that). Others have imagined the silences as being bound up in individual men’s psychologies, largely lost to the historical record.¹⁰ And it seems likely that silences or absences in the record sometimes resulted from the challenges of cultural contact and confusion though, like so many other explorers *cum* pseudo-ethnographers, Lewis,

⁸ *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, Bernard De Voto, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 482.

⁹ *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 485.

¹⁰ Brian Hall’s work of historical fiction, *I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company: A Novel of Lewis and Clark* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), engages in this kind of imagining, and, at one point, suggests the impossibility of truly knowing the reasons behind these gaps: “By then Lewis had stopped writing in the journal. Why? Oh! Who knows, except unwinking Him?” (280).

Clark, and their men often did not hesitate to claim understanding or knowledge of what they did not rightly “know” or what they did not realize they did not know.¹¹

The most notable silence in the journalistic and cartographic record occurs in the middle of the westward trip. This was a particularly difficult stretch of the journey physically but, as Martin Brückner points out, it was also a stretch of the journey that lay in completely unfamiliar territory. Consequently, the men were largely reliant on native sources for a sense of their place in space during this time. In Brückner’s reading of the narrative gap, the men’s relative silence occurs not only because of an Edgar Huntly-like crisis of self and narrative as a result of encountering new and unfamiliar situations, but also because of the explorers’ dependence on native, non-Western conceptions of space and geographic representation; those conceptions were incompatible with the ones that had been pre-scripted for them through their own cultural understandings of spatial representation and through the president’s detailed instructions about what they should look for and what they should see.¹²

Local Indians provided “sketches” of the country, which were turned into simple maps in Clark’s journals. Those native maps might have looked deceptively familiar and the men must have assumed knowledge of the space they would move through as a result. But native maps were complex interweavings of geography, history, and myth that were not directly compatible with European representational conventions.¹³ Thus, the expedition was “lost in space” and, as

¹¹ See James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 113-132 for a discussion of Lewis and Clark as “Plains Ethnographers” and their limitations as ethnographers.

¹² Brückner writes that Jefferson’s expectations as expressed in his instructions to the men “often clouded Lewis and Clark’s response to what they actually saw; their records and manuscript maps persistently registered imaginary geographic features, projecting a continuous transcontinental fluvial morphology that resembled Jefferson’s speculative geographic model of a northwest passage” (Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*, 218).

¹³ See *The History of Cartography: Cartography in the Traditional African, American, Arctic, Australian, and Pacific Societies* (Volume 2, Book 3), J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds. (Chicago: University

Brückner suggests, may have sensed the inadequacy of their Western constructions of space as mappable, claimable, and knowable.¹⁴

An indication of this increasing sense of disorientation and of the inadequacy of European textual and visual conventions to represent the unfamiliar reality before him is evident in Lewis' description of the Great Falls of the Missouri just weeks before his record becomes increasingly sketchy and then occasionally silent. Dissatisfied with his attempts to capture the scene in romantic, sublime prose he regrets:

that I had not brought a crimee obscura [camera obscura] with me by the assistance of which even I could have hoped to have done better but alas this was also out of my reach; I therefore with the assistance of my pen only indeavoured to trace some of the stronger features of this seen by the assistance of which and my recollection aided by some able pencil I hope still to give to the world some faint idea of an object which at this moment fills me with such pleasure and astonishment.”¹⁵

In ultimately wishing for a scientific, supposedly objective reproduction of the scene before his eyes, in wishing to capture an image of the torrent of water flowing over the falls and, eventually, to the Mississippi, Lewis indicates a desire to capture the scene's beauty as his words fail to, and also to fix a sense of familiar “reality” growing increasingly vague. As the Corps pushed up the Missouri words and images seem to have failed over and over, not simply because

of Chicago Press, 1998), specifically Chapter 4, “Maps, Mapmaking, and Map Use by Native North Americans,” by G. Malcolm Lewis, and Chapter 5, “Mesoamerican Cartography,” by Barbara E. Mundy, for a discussion of indigenous map-making practices in the Americas. See also Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) for a discussion of differences between indigenous and European mapping practices in New Spain in the sixteenth-century and of changes to spatial understanding during a colonial moment and Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, especially Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁴ See Brückner, 228-29.

¹⁵ Lewis, Thursday June 13th 1805. University of Nebraska Press/ University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries-Electronic Text Center, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, <http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu>.

of the sublimity of a scene, but perhaps because familiar conventions of spatial representation were useless. Land and narrative could not easily be emplotted.

The myths of American exceptionalist narratives collapse here as Lewis and Clark encounter other narratives, and, as in *Pym* and *Edgar Huntly*, another temporal and spatial collapse manifests itself – that of a gap in the record. Rather than immediately leaping over that fracture and regaining control with Columbus’ “Nevertheless,” the expedition’s record lingers in the space of the gap for a short time between the Falls of the Missouri and the Rockies. The record regains and maintains a level of coherence during the winter spent at Fort Clatsop in present day Oregon and during the return trip east. Then, when the Corps returned to “the Mouth of the Missouri entered the Mississippi River and landed at River deboise where [they] wintered in 1804,” when they arrived back in St. Louis and “the people gathred on the Shore and Huzzared three cheers,” the expedition’s legacy began to solidify.¹⁶ By the time a few narratives of the journey had been published, Lewis and Clark, back on solid ground (though certainly not untroubled in their own ways), had become characters who would later be embedded in the myth of the frontier, their narrative gap, their epistemological crisis, covered over by a larger historical and geographical narrative.

The various lacunae in the expedition’s narrative might stand in for countless other such moments in the first decades of the nineteenth century as, while networks of industry and finance developed in the east (networks that were unsettled and unsettling in their own ways), violent confusion characterized Indian/European exchanges in the west. As Stephanie LeMenager suggests, the time and space of Richard White’s “middle ground,” the place “in between cultures, peoples, and empires,” in which we see “an odd imperialism and a complicated world

¹⁶ Sergeant John Ordway, Tuesday 23 Sept. 1806. University of Nebraska Press/ University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries-Electronic Text Center, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, <http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu>.

system” may have begun to disappear “with the rise of Euro-American hegemony at the start of the nineteenth century.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, during these years spaces of contact, of incommensurabilities, and of polyvocality persisted, producing complex moments and texts that struggle to navigate difference. The narrative “gap” in the Lewis and Clark records suggests just such an unstable place of possibility and of alternatives. Although different ways of experiencing and representing space and time are met largely with silence in this instance, from that silence rises a troubling reminder of encounter and, ultimately, of a failure to negotiate alternative conceptions of place as lived space, of place as space lived through narrative in the context of settlement.

Dividing Lines

As Lewis and Clark’s narrative was shaped by incommensurable conceptions of representations of time and space, Black Hawk’s narrative, one of the earliest American Indian “autobiographies” or “as-told-to” autobiographies, exhibits similar gaps resulting not simply from issues of translation or mediation, but also from differing conceptions of space and history, and of the histories told of particular spaces. The instability and polyvocality of Black Hawk’s narrative, a narrative of horrific movement through traditional Sauk lands, back and forth along the Mississippi River, and through the unfamiliar territory of the East, exists in tension with Euro-American efforts to “emplot” Black Hawk’s history as well as his land. Processes of

¹⁷ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x, xi, quoted in Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 5. See also Laura Mielke, *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 5, for a recent, brief discussion of the concept of the “middle ground” in the context of a specific time and place.

enclosing territories and histories are linked here, and neither process is as simple as it might initially appear.

In 1803, the same year that Jefferson completed the Louisiana Purchase and authorized the Lewis and Clark expedition, he also proposed moving Indians further west so that Euro-Americans could settle throughout the lands east of the Mississippi. James Monroe expanded on this proposal in an address to Congress in 1825, and, in 1830, Indian removal became official federal policy under Andrew Jackson with the passage of the Indian Removal Act. At the same time, legal narratives were crafted to legitimize expansion. The Supreme Court cases that set the tone of federal Indian law were *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), *Cherokee Nation v. The State of Georgia* (1831), and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832). *Johnson v. McIntosh* essentially translated “Indian communal conceptions of land...into the terms of property so that the issue of title could be raised” and Indian “title” declared “prior but inferior” to the federal government’s title.¹⁸ *Cherokee Nation v. The State of Georgia* famously characterized the Cherokee as a “domestic dependent nation” with a relation to the United States as of a “ward” to “his guardian,” preventing the Cherokee nation from suing Georgia for treaty rights, while *Worcester v. Georgia* defined the Cherokee nation as a distinct community but simultaneously solidified the federal government’s power over Indians.¹⁹

Indian removal policy and these legal narratives set the stage for the events recorded in the *Life*. The events of the “Black Hawk War” described in the *Life* took place between May and August 1832, but were prompted by earlier occurrences. In 1828 the Sauk and Fox tribes had been instructed to begin vacating their lands east of the Mississippi, but in the coming years

¹⁸ Eric Cheyfitz, “The (Post)Colonial Construction of Indian Country: U.S. American Indian Literatures and Federal Indian Law,” in *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States since 1945*, Eric Cheyfitz, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 50.

¹⁹ See Cheyfitz, “The (Post)Colonial Construction of Indian County,” 54.

Black Hawk and a band of his people repeatedly returned to their village at the confluence of the Rock and Mississippi Rivers. The American Army was on hand to intervene.²⁰ Attempts to convince Black Hawk to stay away were fruitless, however. After leading his people north toward what he thought would be an alliance with the Winnebago and Potawatomi in Wisconsin and with British forces in Canada (Black Hawk was misled by other Indians to think that this was a possibility), Black Hawk's band returned to their homeland once again. A series of skirmishes between American troops and migrating Indians that ended with the slaughter of many members of Black Hawk's band on the east bank of the Mississippi, the "war" came to occupy a place in the linear narrative of Indian removal. It was, as histories will still point out, the first Indian war fought after the passage of the 1830 Indian Removal Act, and among the last to be fought east of the Mississippi.²¹ That the war was, more accurately, fought on and across the Mississippi, as well as across the Rock and Wisconsin Rivers, speaks, however, to the liminality of its events within that story of westward progress.

The events that precipitated these hostilities had, in fact, begun even earlier, in 1804, when William Henry Harrison had "negotiated" a treaty with the Sauk that relinquished Saukenuk to the United States. Black Hawk refused to recognize this treaty (long seen as unjust and coerced) or those that came later when the American "fathers" sought to finally take possession of the territory. It might, in fact, be argued that these hostilities had their origins even earlier, when European traders first encountered the Sauk people in what is now Canada,

²⁰ Among those involved in this campaign were, famously, Abraham Lincoln, Zachary Taylor, and Jefferson Davis. See Donald Jackson's introduction to his edition of *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955) for a more complete list of "public figures and future public figures...assembled for a time in the Rock River country of the Mississippi Valley" (16).

²¹ See Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Story of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 54. The Second and Third Seminole Wars were, notably, later, from 1835-1842 and 1855-1848 respectively.

beginning the series of events that eventually brought the Sauk south to settle on the Rock River.²²

Black Hawk's narrative rehearses all of this, and more, in an episodic form sometimes seen as related to its genesis in a native oral tradition, and sometimes seen as a result of the denial of that orality through the efforts of the two editorial voices that brought the narrative to publication. Indeed, much of the critical discussion of the *Life* has centered on questions of its authenticity and on the challenge of locating Black Hawk's "voice" in a heavily mediated text. Black Hawk did not speak English, after all, and there is no firm documentation of the process by which the narrative was translated by the French-Canadian/Potawatomi interpreter Antoine LeClair, written up by a young newspaper editor, J.B. Patterson, and published in late 1833.²³

Almost everyone who has written about Black Hawk's narrative recognizes its status as a product of a "textual frontier" between colonizing Euro-Americans and resisting American Indians.²⁴ Preoccupation with the mediation of the Euro-American editor Patterson has led to readings that acknowledge the polyvocality of the narrative but that emphasize the extent to which it is forced into European conventions, the notion that Black Hawk speaks only through his white interpreters, and the idea that the text is ultimately made to fit into the American master

²² See the description of Sauk history in the first few pages of *Black Hawk: An Autobiography*, ed. Donald Jackson, 41-46.

²³ We have only LeClair's statement, published as a preface to the *Life*, that Black Hawk asked him to translate his story and that he "was particularly cautious, to understand distinctly the narrative...throughout," and Patterson's prefatory statement that he "has written this work according to the dictation of Black Hawk, through" LeClair. (See *Black Hawk*, 35; 39.)

²⁴ See Gary Ashwill (drawing on Krupat, *For Those Who Come After*), "Savagism, and Its Discontents: James Fenimore Cooper and His Native American Contemporaries," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (Sept. 1994), 212. The *Life* is variously described as a "joint effort" (Neil Schmitz, "Captive Utterance: Black Hawk and Indian Irony," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 48, no. 4 (1992 Winter), 7), "the aggregate result of a collaboration among three speaking and writing subjects" (Michelle H. Raheja, "'I leave It with the People of the United States to Say': Autobiographical Disruption in the Personal Narratives of Black Hawk and Ely S. Parker," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (2006), 91), and in Arnold Krupat's much quoted term, a "bicultural composite composition" (Krupat, *For Those Who Came After*, 31). Krupat's term is a general one referring to "the Indian autobiography as a genre." He discusses the *Life* in that context.

narrative of progress.²⁵ The *Life*'s opening and closing lines, those that are perhaps most clearly the work of Patterson's editorial pen, are frequently noted to structure and "emplot" the narrative within the larger narratives of both removal and of a dying or doomed race.

The text's first line, "I was born at the Sac Village, on Rock river, in the year 1767, and am now in my 67th year," has the effect of placing Black Hawk's birth on a linear timeline familiar and identifiable to Euro-American readers.²⁶ The inflated rhetoric of its conclusion and its tone of defeat bounds the narrative at its other end, suggesting the inevitability of seemingly acquiescent Indian decline: "The tomahawk is buried forever! We will forget what has past – and may the watchword between the Americans and Sacs and Foxes, ever be – "*Friendship!*" I am now done. A few more moons, and I must follow my fathers to the shades! May the Great Spirit keep our people and the whites always at peace."²⁷ More recently, attention has shifted to the ways in which the text can be seen as one embodying native values and resistance to U.S. Indian policy rather than one in which an indigenous voice is co-opted by Euro-American intermediaries. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that a resisting voice and an indigenous rhetoric or worldview push through the editorial framework.²⁸

²⁵ See, for example, Jackson's Introduction to his 1955 edition of *Black Hawk: An Autobiography*; Krupat, *For Those Who Come After*, 47; 52 and *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 149; 188; Ashwill, Mark Wallace, "Black Hawk's *Autobiography*: Production and Use of an "Indian" Voice," *American Indian Quarterly*, 18 (4), Fall 1994. In the most problematic and extreme version of this focus on Patterson's crafting of the narrative, in 1953 government attorneys argued that Sauk and Fox claims for payments for land were based on a text that, as Jackson puts it, "history had already discredited" (25).

²⁶ *Black Hawk*, 41.

²⁷ *Black Hawk*, 154.

²⁸ See, for example, Schmitz, "Captive Utterance"; Eric Gary Anderson, "Indian Agency: *Life of Black Hawk* and the Countercolonial Provocations of Early Native American Writing," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 52, no. 1-2 (2006); Raheja, "I leave It with the People of the United States to Say"; William Boelhower, "Saving Saukenuk: How Black Hawk won the War and Opened the Way to Ethnic Semiotics," *Journal of American Studies* 25, no. 3 (1991 Dec.); Scott L. Pratt, "The Given Land: Black Hawk's Conception of Place," *Philosophy and Geography* 4 (Feb 2001); and Timothy Sweet, "Masculinity and Self-Performance in the *Life of Black Hawk*," *American Literature* 65, no. 3 (1993 Sept.). See Kendall Johnson, "Peace, Friendship, and Financial Panic: Reading the Mark of Black Hawk

That the Indian and Euro-American “voices” of the *Life* are in tension is undeniable. Patterson exerts control over the narrative and Black Hawk pushes back in ways that Patterson may not have been aware of, making the *Life* simultaneously a text of oppression and of resistance to that oppression. The text is produced in a space of negotiation; as Joshua Bellin asserts, it cannot be “divorced from the contact situation” but rather “reveals Black Hawk’s embeddedness in that situation.” As such, Bellin has convincingly argued, the *Life* “engages powerfully in a discourse on its own production, a discourse that...echoes the conditions of Indian-white encounter: the discourse of ‘speaking for,’ of who can speak for, of, or about the self, the other, and the encounter that binds them.”²⁹ Rather than focusing on questions of authenticity or explicit resistance, Bellin suggests we might think about how the dynamic text comments on itself. These self-reflexive issues of representation within the text are also related to historiographic questions; the text’s “discourse on its own production” becomes a discourse on conflicting historiographical practices that overlap with conflicting perceptions of time and space.

In focusing on the instabilities of the *Life* as a text of complex contact, I do not want to resort to seeing the text solely as a war between two competing worldviews or between two narratives.³⁰ But the tension between a Euro-American notion of “emplotment” linked to spatial

in *Life of Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak*,” *American Literary History* 19, no. 4 (2007 Winter), 774 notes 5, 6, and 7 for a helpful summary of these critical trends.

²⁹ Joshua David Bellin, “How Smooth Their Language: Authenticity and Interculturalism in the *Life of Black Hawk*,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 25 (2000), 488.

³⁰ For readings that analyze the *Life* partly in terms of two narratives and two worldviews see Schmitz’s opposition between the narrative of the medal and that of the medicine bag (9). Johnson takes this concept up as well (see Johnson, 787). See also Boelhower’s discussion of two conflicting narratives, one the pre-scripted, already completed story of removal, and one an artfully woven counternarrative (337). Boelhower’s focus on the way that these competing narratives are linked to different conceptions of place and his attention to narrative form and the geographical movement of war – his argument that Black Hawk’s “opposition takes the form of microhistory” linked to a deep sense of place and his attention to changes in Western mapping practices of the contested area – all have important intersections with my own arguments in this chapter (360).

and temporal conceptions of “progress” and indigenous conceptions that use emplotment differently courses through the *Life*, contributing to its fragmented form and content. Mark Rifkin’s comment in a recent essay on the *Life* is instructive here: “one can interpret the text as an effort to move between discrepant frameworks while making legible the conflict between them.” Moving between “frameworks,” frames, and framing devices is precisely what Black Hawk does within the narrative, resisting spatial and narrative enclosure and questioning how histories of events, lands, and people are constructed and themselves framed.

Immediately following the narrative’s opening sentence positioning Black Hawk as a historical figure within linear time and mappable space (“I was born at the Sac Village, on Rock river, in the year 1767”), resistance to that temporal and spatial enclosure takes the form of alternative temporalities and spatialities through a “mythic” origin story. This story recounts first encounters with Europeans, wanderings and relocations, the eventual alliance of the Sauk and Fox, and the establishment of their village on the Rock River. Nearly two hundred years of history is compressed into a few pages, blurring encounters with white men with directions from the Great Spirit. In fact, the meeting between Europeans and Indians is made to seem destined by the Great Spirit. Both Black Hawk’s great grandfather Na-nà-ma-kee and “the son of the King of France” are said to have had a recurring dream that such a meeting would take place. In a sense, then, this native history does its own work of bounding, plotting, and organizing the events of the past. As Gary Ashwill notes, “by inventing such a prophecy after the fact, the Sauks are able to integrate the inexplicable, traumatic advent of the Europeans into their

worldview.”³¹ Yet this form of history-making differs from a Euro-American focus on linear “facts,” presenting an alternative way of “knowing.” Such a way of knowing, based in an oral tradition, takes seriously the power of that oral tradition to tell of the present. It is a way of knowing that moves comfortably through space and time, compressing, as Neil Schmitz concisely puts it, “the stuff of Francis Parkman’s seven volumes into two paragraphs.”³² The synopsis of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Sauk history moves freely in space not yet framed by European survey lines, describing conflicts and alliances between groups of native peoples and shifts in geographical space, and ending with the loaded comment that the “Sacs” and “Foxes” erected their village, “determined never to leave it.”³³

When the narrative returns to more recent history with Black Hawk’s birth and development into a warrior, his first killing of an enemy, and the subsequent scalp-dance, the text might be seen to progress more linearly through the events of his life up through the Black Hawk war, his capture, and his trip through the American east as a prisoner of the United States army, but this history is, in fact, composed of a series of episodes, repetitions, and returns that are anything but linear and progressive. The narrative is constructed out of a series of journeys away from and back to Saukenuk.³⁴ An ethnographic account of the origin of corn is introduced at one point – an account that brings the reader back into another historical framework – and Black

³¹ Ashwill, 226. See Arnold Krupat, “America’s Histories” in *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) for discussion of “Native historiography’s accounts of events in time...[as] both true and historical apart from their factual accuracy” (48).

³² Schmitz, 10.

³³ *Black Hawk*, 46.

³⁴ For readings that focus on this structure of return, see Boelhower: “In its seasonal peripli in the *Life*, the Sauk tribe constantly moves up and down the Rock, the Mississippi, and the Illinois Rivers...If we were to trace Black Hawk’s movements in his autobiography, we would have a telling series of intersecting and overlapping circles, all of which begin and end in Saukenuk on the Rock River” (347-48). See also Scott Pratt’s contrast between George Bancroft’s western logic of chronological process versus Black Hawk’s “logic of place.” The actions of the second section of the *Life*, in particular, according to Pratt, are “ordered as a series of movements away from and back to the confluence of the Rock and Mississippi Rivers” (115).

Hawk's own understandable confusion about the nature of many of the events going on around him seeps through the narrative, making it difficult for the reader to formulate a sense of what actually "happened."³⁵ The *Life* is full of gaps between cause and effect, between events and the process of reporting them, gaps that highlight a pervasive disconnect between differing conceptions of physical space – of land – and of what can or cannot be done to it.

One of the most obvious instances of such a gap in understanding within the *Life* is Black Hawk's description of his first time signing a treaty, a description that brings issues of spatial and narrative emplotment together in a very real way. By signing the treaty of May 13, 1816, the Sauk unwittingly confirmed the treaty of 1804 signed by just four individuals under dubious circumstances. (Black Hawk notes that those four "had been drunk the greater part of the time they were in St. Louis" to discuss the terms of a treaty.)³⁶ The language of deception continues in the *Life*'s description of the 1816 treaty. Even at the time, those who went to St. Louis to sign the treaty knew "very well that *our Great Father had deceived us*, and thereby *forced us to join the British*, and could not believe that he had put this speech into the mouths of these chiefs to deliver to us."³⁷ They knew that the whites "had told a lie" yet, in the very next paragraph Black Hawk states that "Here, for the first time, I touched the goose quill to the treaty – not knowing, however, that by that act, I consented to give away my village." Here, the potentially misleading qualities of speech are recognized, but the narrative deceptions enacted on paper are realized only after the fact. Furthermore, the fact that a mark on paper could correlate to the relinquishing of land is a foreign concept. "What do we know of the manners and customs of the white people?" Black Hawk muses. "They might buy our bodies for dissection, and we would

³⁵ This ethnographic account may have been lifted, nearly verbatim, from Benjamin Franklin's 1789 essay "Remarks concerning the Savages of North America," resonating with the complexities of historical "emplotment," typology, and repetition discussed here. See Scott Pratt, 114; Bellin, 499.

³⁶ *Black Hawk*, 54.

³⁷ *Black Hawk*, 86.

touch the goose quill to confirm it, without knowing what we are doing. This was the case with myself and people in touching the goose quill the first time.”³⁸

Aligning Sauk bodies with the land suggests that the land is a living entity that cannot be sold and dissected. It also suggests a sense of deep belonging that is associated with the past through numerous references to the bones of ancestors buried in the ground. Breaking up land is breaking up the body of a people, which severs connections between past and present embedded in the land.³⁹ To divide the land into separate plots to be bought and sold is to enact a violent dissection that is unnatural and gruesome. At the same time, the sentence “They might buy our bodies for dissection, and we would touch the goose quill to confirm it, without knowing what we are doing” raises issues of cause and effect in the deceptive work of treaty-making that connect to representations of cause and effect as constructed in historical records. “Buying” bodies happens first here, and then that purchase is confirmed passively, ignorantly, and retrospectively. It is not because a treaty is signed that land is (bodies are) sold. Rather, the action is predetermined and prescribed, and the goose quill is touched to paper to “confirm” what has already been done, capturing a paradox of the emplotment of providential histories: the narrative is set, the bounds are drawn, and then the details are arranged accordingly. The sentence also indicates a critical distrust of written narrative, emphasizing the misleading potential of the mark on paper that may say one thing, but may have relatively little relationship to what “actually” happened, in the present or in the past. Speech can be assessed more directly, but here writing is misleading and potentially empty.

³⁸ *Black Hawk*, 87.

³⁹ See Mark Rifkin, “Documenting Tradition: Territoriality and Textuality in Black Hawk’s Narrative,” *American Literature* 80, no. 4 (2008 Dec), 685. The ideas probed in Rifkin’s article appear in extended form in his *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space*, 75-108.

The lines of writing that purportedly legitimate Euro-American possession of land through treaties (and that then incorporate that possession into a broader master narrative through history writing) are, then, identified with the survey lines that violently dissect the body of the land in a process of dividing and parceling. This theme of Euro-American efforts to over-write the past of the landscape and to subvert traditional communal land usage through defined plots and conceptions of property recurs throughout the narrative. For example, upon arriving back at their village on the Rock River after the trip to St. Louis to “touch the goose quill” to a peace treaty, Black Hawk and his people find U.S. troops building Fort Armstrong on Rock Island where the village had their summer gardens. Confiscating and building over productive land that had provided a profusion of resources, “strawberries, blackberries, gooseberries, plums, apples, and nuts of different kinds,” the troops literally enclose and grid off the space in a fort, “about 270 feet square, with three block houses... The commanding officer’s quarters consist of a center two-story building 28 feet in length, with wings of one story 15 feet in length, and piazzas built in front and rear,” according to a description written a few years later.⁴⁰ Notably, this military, mathematical, grid-like imposition on the land disturbs a spirit within the land, a “good spirit” who had care of the island, “who lived in a cave in the rocks immediately under the place where the fort now stands, and has often been seen by our people... We were particular not to make much noise in that part of the island which he inhabited, for fear of disturbing him. But the noise of the fort has since driven him away, and no doubt a *bad spirit* has taken his place!”⁴¹ Euro-American emplotment drives away the natural “goodness” literally within the land.

Later, having journeyed to their winter hunting grounds hoping that the conflicts over their village would be resolved somehow when they returned, Black Hawk “received information

⁴⁰ Report cited in *Black Hawk*, 87, n. 67.

⁴¹ *Black Hawk*, 88.

that three families of whites had arrived at our village, and destroyed some of our lodges, and were making fences and dividing our corn-fields for their own use – *and were quarreling among themselves about their lines, in the division!*”⁴² Again, productive land is divided and parceled, split up with lines signifying both personal possession of something that, as Black Hawk states a few pages later “*cannot be sold,*” and geographic knowledge of a space – a knowledge of gridded lines rather than of “spirit.”⁴³ This language of dividing and parceling corn-fields, and land more generally, persists throughout the narrative as space is framed on scales large and small.

These lines of spatial division are not only representative of the imposition of a particular type of (capitalist) economy and a particular relationship to land and space, but they also bring back the notion of plot and emplotment. Peter Brooks notes, “Common to the original sense of the word [plot] is the idea of boundedness, demarcation, the drawing of lines to mark off and order. This easily extends to the chart or diagram of the demarcated area, which in turn modulates to the outline of the literary work,” and, I would add, to the historical work.⁴⁴ Dividing and selling plots of land was a component of ordering newly claimed western space, as in Jefferson’s proposal to grid off the area east of the Mississippi, and was a part of telling a story about the past, present, and future of that land. Conflicting attitudes toward land and toward uses of land are, then, tied to alternative notions of narrating past and present. As Black Hawk and his people repeatedly return to their ancestral lands, the narrative circles back on time and events within the bounds set by the narrative.

⁴² *Black Hawk*, 99. Italics in the original.

⁴³ *Black Hawk*, 101. See, again, Boelhower and Scott Pratt for resonances of their arguments with this concept.

⁴⁴ Brooks, 12.

The Sauk attachment to place and refusal of narrative containment is also reflected in references to movement down into rather than across the landscape within the *Life*. While Euro-American settlers and military troops quarrel over lines of division and construct grids, working to bring “order” to the surface of the land, throughout *Black Hawk*’s narrative digging into the land rather than bracketing it off is associated with a level of resistance. As mentioned, throughout the *Life* attention to the bones of ancestors buried in the land suggests a deep connection to place through the past, and the unfathomable notion that traditional lands might be usurped is compounded by the presence of bones in the ground. For example, a sense of shock is apparent in the sentence ““He had purchased the land on which my lodge stood, and that of our *grave yard* also!”⁴⁵ At other moments, the sense of the past of bodies within the land provides motivation for resistance. At one point the “prophet” advises Black Hawk “never to give up our village, for the whites to plough up the bones of our people.”⁴⁶ And indeed, digging down into the physical earth is explicitly associated with warfare and resistance on a number of occasions.

This digging has logistical purposes, as when, having been provided with artillery by the British, Black Hawk and a group of men “went to work ...and dug up the ground in two places, to put the big gun in, that the men might remain in with it, and be safe.”⁴⁷ On other occasions, digging down into the land almost takes a gothic tone of live burial, as when Black Hawk recounts that in the process of attacking a fort, “I dug a hole with my knife, deep enough, (by placing a few weeds around it,) to conceal myself.”⁴⁸ Here, the land provides protection when

⁴⁵ *Black Hawk*, 104.

⁴⁶ *Black Hawk*, 100.

⁴⁷ *Black Hawk*, 80.

⁴⁸ *Black Hawk*, 59. See Sarah Winnemucca’s *Life Among the Piutes* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994) for a similar moment of “live burial.” Sarah and her cousin are “buried alive” to protect them from the approaching “white people” (11-12).

Black Hawk is on the offensive. Later, during the Battle of the Sink-Hole, the land is simultaneously a trap and a source of protection:

The enemy rushed upon us without giving us time to reload. They surrounded us, and forced us to run into a deep sink-hole, at the bottom of which there were some bushes. We loaded our guns, and awaited the approach of the enemy. They rushed to the edge of the hole and fired, killing one of our men... We reloaded, and commenced digging holes in the side of the bank to protect ourselves, whilst a party watched the movements of the enemy, expecting that their whole force would be upon us immediately. Some of my warriors commenced singing their *death-songs!*⁴⁹

It is difficult not to see this image as one in which Black Hawk and his men literally seem to be digging their own graves, but ultimately they escape from the hole, leaving behind an image of gothic violence and layered conflict. “There were eighteen in this trap with me,” the narrative continues. “We all got out safe, and found one white man dead on the edge of the sink-hole. They did not remove him for fear of our fire. We *scalped* him and placed our dead man upon him! We could not have left him in a better situation than on an enemy!”⁵⁰ Leaving a scene of layered violence, an image of “conjuncture” that prefigures one that will be discussed in the next chapter, the Indians have the last word here, refusing to meet their deaths in the enclosed space of the sink-hole, instead harnessing that space as an image of resistance.

In an autobiographical “Rereading of Black Hawk’s *Autobiography*,” David L. Newquist remembers looking down into the ravines whose creeks lead to the Rock and Mississippi Rivers well over a century after Black Hawk’s battle for the same land. The ravines, Newquist remembers, were:

a vantage point through which one could perceive the presences that lived on the landscape over time, places where one was crucially aware that history is not obscure events that have washed away in a river of time, but the convergence of forces and events that shape the present moment. As children we roamed through the ravines and encountered wildlife and artifacts left there by centuries of American Indians who passed through them. We found stone points, outcroppings of chert from which the points were

⁴⁹ *Black Hawk*, 75.

⁵⁰ *Black Hawk*, 75.

made, harness hardware, pottery shards from different ages, and we followed paths that had been worn into the soft alluvial soils by American Indians walking between villages or hunting for game.⁵¹

Looking back on an alternative history of the landscape requires, for Newquist, looking into the land through the vertical layers of the past that provide an alternative to the stories now available on the surface. Breaking up the master narrative requires digging down into a particular space, following the ravines and creeks to the larger rivers that bound spaces and narratives, and simultaneously refuse bounding. The notion that waterways might serve as metaphors for a river of time washing away the past, but that they are in fact sites of remembering, of a “convergence of forces and events” conjures the complexities of the Mississippi as simultaneously a line in a spatial and temporal narrative of progress that ignored many pasts, and a dynamic space of movement, confluence, and divergence. The river was a landmark in the master narrative of Euro-American movement westward, first the western boundary of the nation, and then a boundary separating peoples, at least ostensibly. As Black Hawk reflects, “I had understood from our Great Father, that the Mississippi was to be the dividing line between his red and white children, and that he did not wish *either to cross it*.”⁵² Yet crossing the river is exactly what Black Hawk does repeatedly within the text, and what the text itself did as it traveled to Cincinnati to be published, refusing to be bounded and offering a history that refuses to be bounded. The Mississippi was, in one sense, a dividing line within a plotted geographical and historical narrative, but it is one that Black Hawk’s *Life* crosses.

The demarcation of space that Black Hawk refused to follow can, then, be aligned with his seeming awareness of the pre-scripted, emplotted history that threatened to take over his

⁵¹ David Newquist, “A Rereading of *Black Hawk’s Autobiography*,” *Midamerica: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature* 29 (2002), 78-79.

⁵² *Black Hawk*, 150.

narrative. For example, Black Hawk had observed Euro-American military reporting during the War of 1812, remembering in the *Life* that not only did the British and Americans have peculiar military practices, marching out “in open daylight,” and fighting, “regardless of the number of warriors they may lose,” but that “After the battle is over, they retire to feast, and drink wine, as if nothing had happened; after which they make a *statement in writing*, of what they have done – *each party claiming the victory!* and neither giving an account of half the number that have been killed on their own side.”⁵³ Again, the lines of writing – the product of touching quill to paper – frame an account of events according to the desires of the writer, dividing space on the page into knowable stories of past actions, just as fields are crossed with dividing lines making land knowable as geographic space and as property. Black Hawk knew, these sentences suggest, that those with the power to narrate would recount events as they wanted them to be remembered. He understands, as Neil Schmitz puts it, that “American military history...will demean his recrossing of the Mississippi,” turning it to fit a needed end goal.⁵⁴ This awareness of competing histories, of quarrels over emplotment, makes Black Hawk’s dictation of his story to an interpreter and a Euro-American editor all the more complex, capturing as it does an awareness of how histories and narratives are held captive within the demarcating lines of inscription.

That Black Hawk saw the need to appeal to and use Euro-American voices to tell his story, but was also aware of the tendency of those voices to tell the story that they wanted told is also evident in details of his 1829 meeting with the former Governor of Illinois Edward Cole and Judge James Hall, who had, by that point, been in Illinois for nine years. Hall had already served as state treasurer and had taken a leading role in the formation of an Illinois state historical society. He had bought a half interest in the *Illinois Intelligencer*, was in the process of founding

⁵³ *Black Hawk*, 71.

⁵⁴ Schmitz, 4.

the *Illinois Monthly Magazine* (for which he would do much of the writing), and had published an annual, the *Western Souvenir, a Christmas and New Year's Gift for 1829*, a collection of tales and verse (of which approximately one third were supplied by Hall himself, including his popular story "The Indian Hater," later taken up in *The Confidence-Man*). Hall was, then, well on his way to becoming Illinois' "man of letters."

In the *Life*, Black Hawk notes that when these two men visited Rock Island that summer he "called upon them and begged to explain to them the grievances under which me and my people were laboring, hoping that they could do something for us."⁵⁵ After recounting the things that he told them, Black Hawk remembers, "Neither of them could do anything for us; but both evidently appeared very sorry."⁵⁶ Even while, or especially while, seeking the assistance of a local historian and writer, Black Hawk apparently expressed awareness of the tendency of writings by white men to mislead.⁵⁷ According to a later account of this meeting in Thomas McKenney and James Hall's three volume *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*, after hearing Black Hawk's grievances, Cole and Hall asked, "'Why do you not represent these things to our Government – the president is a wise and good ruler; he would protect you?' The reply was, 'Our Great Father is too far off; he cannot hear our voice.' But you could have letters written and sent to him.' 'So we could,' said the old man, 'but the white men would write letters and say that we told lies. Our Great Father would not believe an Indian in preference to his own children.'"⁵⁸ Here, "letters" saying "that we told lies" suggest both the misleading potential of

⁵⁵ *Black Hawk*, 102.

⁵⁶ *Black Hawk*, 103-04.

⁵⁷ For more on discourses of authenticity and speech acts as immediate, as opposed to written texts, see Bellin, especially 495-500.

⁵⁸ Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America, with Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of the Principal Chiefs Embellished with One Hundred and Twenty Portraits, from the Indian Gallery in the Department of War, at Washington, in Three Volumes*, Volume 1 (Philadelphia: J.T. Bowen, 1848), 226.

documents sent to someone in a distant place, and of words comprised of alphabetical “letters” more generally. The lines of written letters on a page have the power to tell a different story, lacking both the immediacy of speech and of observation. The narrative told by the white men, inscribed on paper, and sent to a distant place will take precedent over other accounts.

There is something provocative in the idea of Black Hawk expressing this concern, this awareness, to someone like Judge James Hall, whose own published “letters” would come to tell a history of the western lands that Black Hawk was fighting for. Indeed, the very *History* that contains this anecdote is a complex product of various individuals’ desires to document stories of Indian chiefs and tribes before they “disappeared.” McKenney, who had been head of the newly established Bureau of Indian Affairs until being removed from that post by Andrew Jackson, collaborated with Hall on the history, which contains one hundred and seventeen textual “sketches” of Indians from Pocahontas to Black Hawk, along with the one hundred and twenty hand colored lithographs based on portraits commissioned by McKenney. These lithographs, presented first in an elaborate folio edition “pronounced by the learned and polished both of Europe and America, to be one of the most valuable and interesting productions of the present age,” and later in a more affordable royal octavo edition that would “place [the history] within reach of the thousands, who, with taste and learning equal to those of the patrons of the large edition, have no less capacity to appreciate its worth and beauties,” became the most well-recognized pre-photographic images of the Indians they portray and are still frequently reproduced.⁵⁹ Hall’s words and the delineations that accompanying them enclose the lives of the individuals they describe, first within a space measuring about 20 inches by 14 inches, and then in a smaller and more economical space that mimics the bounding of those Indians themselves

⁵⁹ McKenney and Hall, ii. See Sweet for discussion of images of Black Hawk, whose portrait was “captured” by George Catlin during Black Hawk’s time imprisoned at Jefferson Barracks.

into ever more limited spaces. Reprinted for decades, the *History* became a well-recognized authority on Indian lives and history, its “letters” attempting to solidify knowledge of Native history.

These tensions surrounding the attempted containment of histories and of spaces, surrounding movement between “frameworks,” are finally enacted within the *Life* through the description of Black Hawk’s movement around a perimeter of the tale of American might and progress. Black Hawk and five other men had been taken prisoner at the conclusion of the “war” and held in Jefferson Barracks, south of St. Louis through the winter of 1832-33. During the following spring the American government paraded Black Hawk and those men around the Eastern United States, hoping to discipline them by exhibiting the disciplining of space on many scales.

Moving from St. Louis to Cincinnati to Fredericktown to Washington (including a stint at Fort Monroe), then on to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, and Detroit before returning to Rock Island, this procession served to frame Black Hawk’s story as an individual and as a representative of Indian peoples for the American public. At the same time it sought to frame a story of American progress for Black Hawk, making the possession of the space of the Eastern United States seem complete and inevitable. The point was, as William Boelhower states, to force Black Hawk to see, and to be seen: to see the might of the American military, to awe him with the network of roads and railroads crossing, dividing, and framing the landscape, to astonish him with military parades, and with sights such as the ascent of a man in a hot air balloon who disappears into the clouds and gains a perspective on the whole of the landscape.⁶⁰ By parading Black Hawk around a circle of Eastern cities, governmental powers tried to force his

⁶⁰ See Boelhower, 357.

body to enact the bounding of space, moving around a perimeter of control that is not, of course, the whole nation, but that stands in for it. In witnessing how the land is divided up, traveled through, and known as an entity, as from the perspective of the hot air balloon that mimics the overarching eye of a master narrative and of a map gridding off the landscape, Black Hawk is (at least in theory) made to feel and to tread the imposed boundaries of space and of meaning.⁶¹ Ironically, however, this is attempted through movement as Black Hawk crosses the very boundaries that he is meant to learn.

This attempted large-scale disciplining of space is echoed in the specifics of individual stops in the course of the disciplinary trip. For example, Black Hawk was taken to visit Philadelphia's Cherry Hill Prison, later known as Eastern State Penitentiary. This visit is not recorded in the *Life* but we know of it from other contemporary reports. "The whole of the deputation...were taken to the Cherry Hill prison, and shown the manner in which white men punish," noted Philadelphia's *United States (Literary) Gazette* on June 29, 1832. Donald Jackson quips that to "six Indians who had just spent a winter imprisoned at Jefferson Barracks, this must have been the least informative aspect of their tour," but Cherry Hill was not just another prison.⁶² It was a dramatic early experiment in surveillance and emplotment; it was the first "penitentiary," a display of control in the guise of humanitarian work.

Opened in 1829, one year before the 1830 Indian Removal Act, the prison was intended to humanize the penal system, to improve living conditions in prisons, and to induce reform. Prisons had been a focus of reform in England and America since the final decades of the eighteenth-century. Various models had emerged that sought to replace the chaos and unsanitary

⁶¹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) for the classic discussion of shifting relationships between bodies, spaces, and discipline, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The emphasis on enclosing space and on being seen evident in Black Hawk's trip is particularly resonant with Foucault's work.

⁶² Jackson, in *Black Hawk*, 10.

conditions of jails with order – separate cells for inmates, organized work, time-tables. John Haviland, the architect who designed Cherry Hill Prison came to Philadelphia from England in 1816 and was eventually commissioned to design a spatial form for ideals of surveillance and reform that had been circulating in Britain, but that Haviland and the Philadelphia Prison Society made an American reality (See Figure 3.2).⁶³

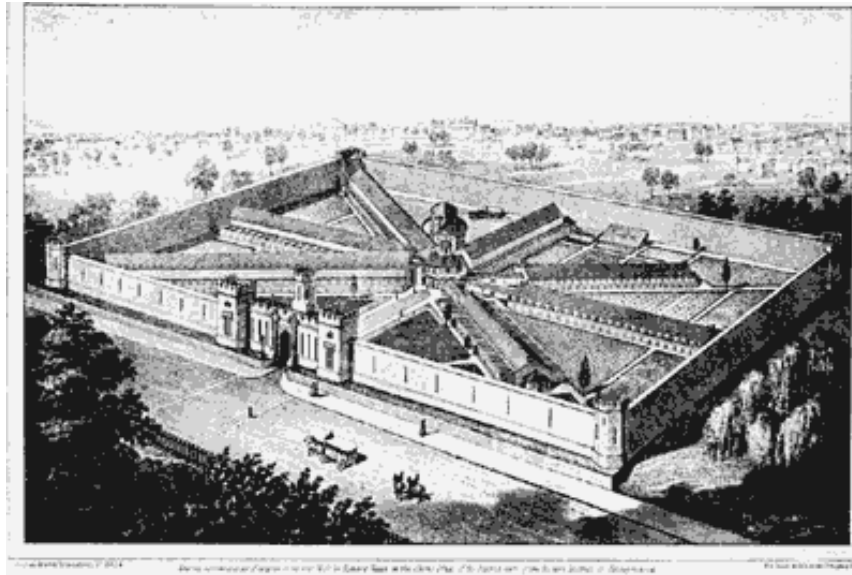


Figure 3.2: Exterior of Cherry Hill Prison, Samuel Cowperthwaite, lithograph published by P.S. Duval and Company (1855).
(The Library Company of Philadelphia)

Cherry Hill was a progenitor of the “hub and spoke” or “radial” system of prison design (a relative of the panopticon). Only a few guards were needed to monitor the halls since all cell blocks branched off from a central point (See Figure 3.3). The perspective of a guard sitting in the prison’s central tower, like the perspective of the man rising upward in the hot air balloon, was one of all-encompassing vision and control of space. What distinguished Cherry Hill from other contemporary experiments with individual cells and radial design was that inmates were, theoretically, completely constrained narratively and spatially. They slept, worked, and ate in

⁶³ See Norman Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art for the Eastern State Penitentiary Task Force of the Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, 1994), 33-35.

solitary cells lit only by a single small window in the ceiling, significantly nicknamed the “eye of God.” They had hoods placed over their heads whenever they were taken out of solitary confinement. The idea of this “Philadelphia system,” a system informed by Quaker ideals, was that given enough time communing with God in silence, these individuals would be “penitent,” and thus would be reformed.⁶⁴

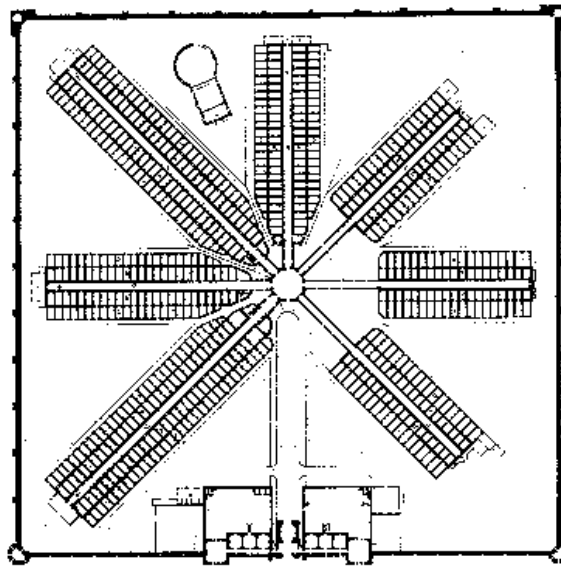


Figure 3.3: Radial design of Cherry Hill Prison

Haviland’s monstrous, gothic building made to look like a fortified castle eventually became a major tourist attraction and the Philadelphia system was adopted throughout Europe. It is estimated that Cherry Hill served as a model for approximately three hundred prisons. An American model of spatial and narrative discipline informed attempts to discipline individuals

⁶⁴ This system’s rival throughout the nineteenth century was the Auburn system of communal silent work. For an extensive history of Cherry Hill/Eastern State Penitentiary see the Penitentiary’s website, which provides a link to a 571-page Historic Structures Report (<http://easternstate.org/learn/research-library/history/571-page-history>). For a recent discussion of the role of the prison in American literature and culture see Caleb Smith, *The Prison and the American Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). One rather recent book, Scott Christianson’s *With Liberty For Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998) discusses Eastern State Penitentiary right before a short section on Indian Removal, but does not acknowledge Black Hawk’s visit to that penitentiary (132-141).

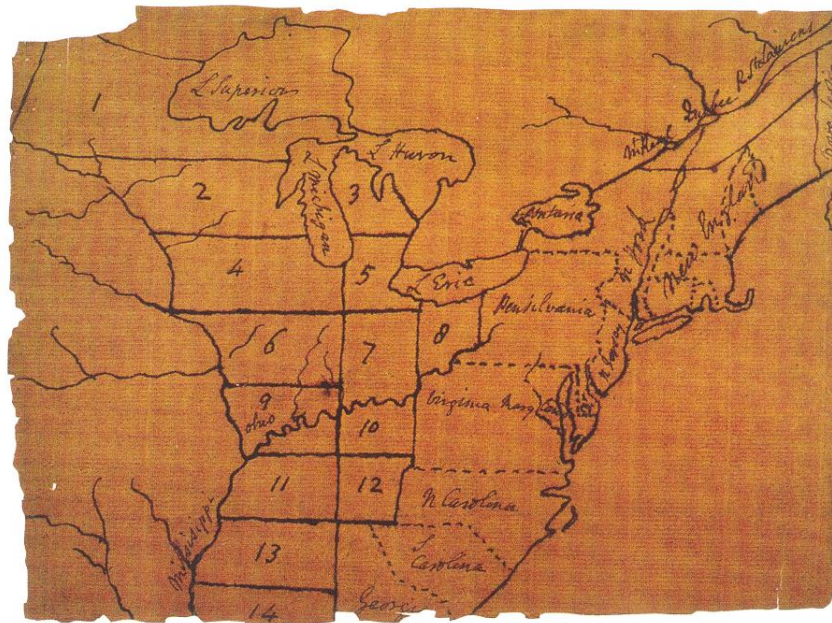
and space all over the globe.⁶⁵ What Black Hawk would have witnessed on his own visit was the attempted control of individual identities and voices, in the name of penitence, but also with the goal of silencing alternative pasts in order to cultivate a uniformly moral future. A “fence” of thick stone was erected, and problematic persons were quietly placed within it in the hope that they would eventually be assimilated into civilized society through their silence and conversion to the proper ways of being in the world. Cherry Hill’s work of disciplining was not necessarily successful, however, and it was certainly not without its critics.⁶⁶ Debate about the humanity of this “humane” institution was often bitter. Complete solitude did not, in fact, result in penitence. An individual’s past could not be erased by confinement in a twelve-foot by eight-foot cell.

The guard in the prison tower and the man in the hot air balloon looking down over networks of roads and rails that bound and cross space mimic the distanced perspective of Jefferson’s map with the twisted line of the Mississippi as its western boundary, and of the narrative frame placed around Black Hawk’s *Life*. These are, in a sense, fitting images for Black Hawk’s entire trip through the east. Being made to travel around a perimeter so that he could witness America in its powerful, all-seeing entirety, Black Hawk was simultaneously seen everywhere that he went. He saw, and was seen in accordance with the situations constructed by his captors. In some ways, Black Hawk’s trip east might also be viewed as the inverse of Lewis and Clark’s trip west thirty years earlier. Like Lewis and Clark, Black Hawk’s path was established by governmental authorities who attempted to script his experience. And, nevertheless, ruptures in conceptions of space and place, in familiarity and understanding,

⁶⁵ See Johnston, 105: “Over three hundred prisons worldwide show the direct or indirect imprint of Haviland’s Philadelphia and Trenton prisons. It is on the basis of both contributions that Cherry Hill must be considered the most influential prison ever built and arguably the American building most widely imitated in Europe and Asia in the nineteenth century.”

⁶⁶ Charles Dickens visited in 1842 and was highly critical of the prison in *American Notes for General Circulation*.

pervade the description of the trip within the narrative, as they pervade the narrative as a whole. Black Hawk's visit to Cherry Hill Prison is just one gap within a narrative defined by incongruities and incommensurabilities, yet it is one that captures the attempted disciplining of space and historical narrative, and persistent challenges to that disciplining, evident throughout the *Life*.⁶⁷ The narrative's formal fragmentation and tensions – its returns, drops, gaps, and repetitions – signify competing, resistant histories within the frame of the narrative. This is both a resistance to spatial and to narrative or historical emplotment – a resistance to Jefferson's stated plan to enclose "the whole in a single fence," a fence that must be viewed as physical and narratological, and thus historical. Fencing in land was about telling a certain narrative of the land's availability, and a narrative of historical progress. Resistance to that fencing and dividing is also about different conventions of relating to those places and to stories of their pasts.



A map of the United States east of the Mississippi River...
by David Hartley, 1784.
(William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan)

⁶⁷ Raheja's argument about resistance through withholding information, creating gaps and lacunae to escape closure and autobiographical containment and its relationship to resisting emplotment seems important here.

While Black Hawk was being taken on a trip “forward” in time through the “civilized” east with its technological developments and orderly ways, the “future” continued to move west.⁶⁸ The bounds of the fence continued to expand, and when Black Hawk returned to his homeland, settlement had extended across the Mississippi. That body of water was no longer the “dividing line” between “white and red” – not even ostensibly. Incorporated into a mythology of American progress and “civilization” moving ever westward, the river nevertheless remained an unstable feature of the geographical and historical landscape. A fracture running through a fractured, violent historical narrative that seeks to enclose a life and landscape even as that life and landscape resist and refuse enclosure, the river, like the ravines holding the creeks that feed into it, tells a story of conflict between lines drawn, and a fluidity that contradicts those dividing lines.

Terra Firma, Bona Fide

When twenty-year old Herman Melville took his first trip west to Illinois in June 1840, a mere eight years after the Black Hawk War, the region was still a frontier, though it was increasingly being incorporated into American life and commerce. Galena, where Melville and his friend Eli James Murdock Fly planned to visit Melville’s uncle and to make their fortunes, was founded around 1827 and officially incorporated in 1839.⁶⁹ The town was on land once

⁶⁸ See David C. Lipscomb, ““Water Leaves No Trail,”” Mapping Away the Vanishing American in Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales” in *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century*, ed. Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 55-71 for a helpful discussion of nineteenth-century thinking about the spatiotemporality of the progress of civilization, especially in the context of rivers.

⁶⁹ See Roger Biles, *Illinois: A History of the Land and Its People* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 79-80.

inhabited by the Sauk and Fox nations, not far from the confluence of the Mississippi and Rock Rivers where Black Hawk had fought his “war.”⁷⁰ Little is known about Melville’s trip. That Melville and Fly traveled on the Mississippi as far as Cairo on their return east later that summer is speculation, but it seems undeniable that Melville would have been aware of recent, and ongoing, tensions between settlers and the Indians who had been pushed west of the river.⁷¹

Melville harnessed the fluidity of the river in the last work of prose fiction published during his lifetime, a work frequently read as exhibiting his increasing frustration with his personal situation and with his country, and his skepticism toward a range of ideas and contemporary movements. A tale not only of movement, but also in movement, *The Confidence-Man* never truly lands, traveling along the Mississippi as the genre-blurring narrative follows shape-shifting, trickster-like characters from episode to episode. Ostensibly describing a day on the ironically named steamer “Fidèle” (from the Latin for “faith”), the space actually traveled in its pages is that of narrative and “metaphysical” uncertainty. Simple binaries are questioned as the confidence man turns things first one way and then another, contributing to the destabilization of narrative that is one of the novel’s primary functions. The entire work operates through a level of relativity that, as with Black Hawk’s *Life*, destabilizes emplotment. Taking up

⁷⁰ In setting the stage for a description of the Black Hawk “War,” McKenney and Hall comment, “The territory of Illinois had been formed into a state, and the settlements which had commenced in the southern part of this delightful country, were rapidly extending to the north. The Sauks and Foxes still occupied the most desirable part of the state, and around their village in every direction was an immense district of wilderness, over which they hunted. In the extreme north-western part of the state, at Fever river, a rich mineral region was discovered, and began to be occupied, and the flourishing town of Galena sprung into existence” (222).

⁷¹ See Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography* vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 177-78 for a concise summary of biographical speculations about Melville’s potential Mississippi voyage and calculations of his probable homeward route. Yukiko Oshima, in “Native America in *The Confidence Man*: Quite an Original Satire and Scene,” *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 8, no. 3 (2006 Oct) makes the connection between Melville’s trip and the Black Hawk War, but incorrectly states that the trip occurred in 1837 and the publication of Black Hawk’s *Autobiography* in 1856.

the flow of the Mississippi, the novel emphasizes the fluid negotiation between narration, belief in that narration, and the often problematic or misleading ideologies perpetuated by narration.

From the outset, *The Confidence-Man* engages with the Mississippi's association with master narratives of progress, territorial expansion, and fluid multiplicity. At the beginning, the river represents the entire space of America in moments that mimic the tone of Hall's Introduction to *Letters from the West*. "Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West," the novel proclaims, "whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide."⁷² Descriptions of embarking and disembarking crowds, of passengers emitting "a murmur as of bees in the comb," evoke a quintessentially American sense of unified individualism.⁷³ Individualism and fragmentation rather than unity prevail as the novel proceeds, however, and as it becomes increasingly clear that the only thing that defines the space of "the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West" is uncertainty.

Inserted in the midst of this movement is a "historical" narrative so plotted and set that it has, for many critics, stood out as the perplexing center of the novel. Indeed, the "Indian-hating" chapters that form the middle of the book provide a clear, well-known story with a beginning and an end, which is part of what makes them important, but not for the reasons that have frequently been offered. These chapters are not the core of the novel, as so many have claimed. They do not hold the key to the "metaphysics" of the entire work. They are another stop along a flowing, recursive narrative composed of fragmentary, repetitive stops.

⁷² Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* ed. Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (New York: Norton, 2006), 17.

⁷³ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 16.

This section of the novel has prompted just as much speculation about Melville's "real" attitude toward indigenous peoples as there has been discussion of issues of authenticity within Black Hawk's narrative. Early critics who failed to grasp the pervasive ironic tone of the novel were confused by the contradictions between the violent attitude of the Indian-hater and Melville's own complicated, unsettled attitude toward Indians and the categories of "savagery" and "civilization," expressed in texts such as *Typee* and in his review of Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*.⁷⁴ The "Indian-hating" chapters might taunt readers with attractive allegorical or biographical readings, but the deceptively simple, framed story of the Indian-hater is actually a series of stories within stories that exemplifies the narrative complexity of the novel. By reading these chapters in the context of the ironic tone and instability of metanarratives operating within the work as a whole, we see Melville making a statement about the problematic instability of historical "emplotment" into conventional narrative forms.

Briefly, the Indian-hating chapters begin when the confidence man, in the form of the cosmopolitan who later introduces himself as Frank Goodman, meets a stranger, Charlie Noble, who says that the skeptical misanthrope from whom the cosmopolitan has just parted (the Missouri bachelor), reminds him of Colonel John Moredock of Illinois. Noble settles into a long preamble in which he explains that the tale he will tell of Moredock is not his own. "I never

⁷⁴ See Branch et. al., "Historical Note" in the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *The Confidence-Man*, ed. Hayford, Parker, and Tanselle (1984) for a summary of criticism on issues of "Indian-hating." See also William M. Ramsey, "The Moot Points of Melville's Indian-Hating," *American Literature*, 52, no. 2 (1980 May), 224-26 for a helpful summary of the criticism preceding his essay. While Melville's attitude toward native peoples is, in many ways, a "moot point," as Ramsay points out – moot in the sense that it does not illuminate the larger workings of the novel – the highly ironic tone of the Indian-hating portion of the novel is very much in keeping with Melville's complicated attitude toward race, racism, and cultural stereotypes. For example, a biting jab at federal Indian law shows that Melville remained very much aware of the painful realities of official policy toward indigenous peoples. In the course of relating the way Judge Hall would set up Moredock's story, Charlie Noble comments, "But whether, on this or any point, the Indians should be permitted to testify for themselves, to the exclusion of other testimony, is a question that may be left to the Supreme Court" (152).

fully saw the man,” Noble admits, “yet, have I, one way and another, heard about as much of him as any other; in particular, have I heard his history again and again from my father’s friend, James Hall, the judge, you know.”⁷⁵ Noble then tells Hall’s story as the Judge himself would have told it, beginning with more general reflections on Indian-hating, and then telling the story of Moredock, who lived his life as an “Indian-hater,” seeking revenge for the murders of his mother and siblings who had been traveling to hamlets on the west shore of the Mississippi when they were ambushed by a party of Indians at “the rock of the Grand Tower on the Mississippi, where they had to land and drag their boats round a point swept by a strong current.”⁷⁶

This story within a story within a story, as Noble tells the Judge’s story of Moredock’s life, is further complicated by the fact that Melville is engaging with writings by the actual Judge James Hall.⁷⁷ In adapting Hall’s accounts of the historical Moredock in *Sketches of the West* and his short story “The Indian Hater,” Melville critiques rapidly reproduced popular narratives that do not probe deeply into “metaphysical” questions.⁷⁸ Even more significant to the broader critiques of the novel, however, is the fact that, through Hall, Melville is able to critique the kind of generic historical emplotment that the novel makes Hall’s work exemplify. Although Hall acknowledged some complexities and nuances in his histories and historical sketches, noting in his chapter on Moredock in *Sketches of the West*, for example, that Indian-hating is an ideology and that individuals “know the story [of Indian atrocities] only as it was told to them,” and

⁷⁵ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 147.

⁷⁶ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 158.

⁷⁷ Hall’s sketches were established as sources for the Indian-hating chapters by Elizabeth Foster. (See her 1954 edition of *The Confidence-Man* (New York: Hendricks House).)

⁷⁸ Tom Quirk argues that Melville “was at some pains to distinguish himself from such authors who...seem oblivious or complacently indifferent to the paradoxical intricacies of human behavior” and that “Hall may be considered as the type-exponent of a familiar sort of literary confidence man, a writer who caters to the superficial desires and expectations of unwary and indiscriminating readers” (“A Pragmatic Defense of Source Study: Melville’s ‘Borrowings’ from Judge James Hall,” *Mosaic* 26, no. 4 (1993 Fall), 30; 32).

commenting in the biographical sketch of Black Hawk in *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* that Indians were often unjustly suspected of wrongs, he also abided by stock narrative and historical conventions of progress associated with the movement west as an advancement toward civilization and Christianity.⁷⁹ His writings often repeat standard tales of spatial and temporal progress exemplified in sentences such as, “The ancestor met the red men in battle upon the shores of the Atlantic, and his descendants have pursued the footsteps of the retreating tribes, from year to year, throughout a whole century, and from the eastern limits of our great continent to the wide prairies of the west.”⁸⁰

In adopting Hall’s accounts of Moredock, Melville removes any sense of sympathy for the Indians present in Hall’s original texts, and any sense that Indian violence stems from white aggression.⁸¹ In doing so he solidifies the “type” of the Indian-hater, which was, by 1857, a well-established figure in historical and fictional writings. A man alone, living on the fringes of society and devoting his life to revenging Indian atrocities, the Indian-hater paradoxically operates outside of the bounds and sanctions of civilization in order to uphold those bounds.⁸² Charles Brockden Brown’s Edgar Huntly might be an early version of the Indian-hater, but the type was firmly set in later decades and is epitomized in Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Nick of the Woods*, in which Nathan Slaughter, thought to be a Quaker pacifist, turns out to be the mythic Jibbenainosay, revenging the deaths of his family members by killing Indians and leaving his mark, a cross, carved into his victims’ chests. By firmly inscribing this type Melville is able to

⁷⁹ James Hall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the West*, vol. II (Philadelphia, 1835), 78; McKenney and Hall, 221.

⁸⁰ Hall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the West*, 75.

⁸¹ See Elizabeth Foster’s Introduction to *The Confidence-Man* for discussion of these changes.

⁸² See Stephen Matterson, “Indian-Hater, Wild Man: Melville’s *Confidence Man*,” *Arizona Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (1996 Summer), 23-26; 29 for a thorough discussion of the standard characteristics of the “Indian-hater” archetype. See also Roy Harvey Pearce “Melville’s Indian-Hater: A Note on the Meaning of *The Confidence Man*,” *PMLA* 67, no. 7 (1952 Dec.), 943-44 for a similar discussion, as well as for a brief catalog of antebellum novels and sketches about “Indian-haters.”

parody the kind of unthinking master narrative that would seem to be supported by such historical and fictional typology (though this typology is always more unsettled than it might initially appear).⁸³

Furthering Hall's suitability as a subject for parodying the emplotment of history into standard narratives and types (reminiscent of Simms' historical narratives, discussed in the Introduction) was the fact that Hall exemplified the period's "culture of reprinting," republishing his stories and sketches numerous times in different venues.⁸⁴ For example, "The Indian Hater" appeared in at least three separate collections and Hall drew on similar material in numerous other stories. He also frequently republished his histories, many of them containing essays republished from magazines, simply changing out-of-date statistics. *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the West* (1835) was published as *The Romance of Western History, or Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the West* (1857) with very few changes. *Notes on the Western States* (1838) was republished as *The West* (1848).⁸⁵ Thus, the embeddedness and repetition of

⁸³ See John Samson, *White Lies: Melville's Narrative of Facts* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 173-210, for discussion of critiques of historical master narratives and historical typology within Melville's *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, written immediately before *The Confidence-Man*. See also Russell Reising, *Loose Ends: Closure and Crisis in the American Social Text* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 117-85, for an extensive consideration of Melville's "counterhegemonic historiographical project" in *Israel Potter* (141). Aligning himself with Samson, Reising claims that in *Israel Potter* Melville insinuates, "To write history...is necessarily to align oneself with some exclusionary narrative scheme" (163). In focusing on Melville's treatment of Benjamin Franklin, Reising demonstrates the subtle complexity of Melville's historiographical critique, and the extent to which the critique relies on the predetermined understanding of the "American Revolution and the claims of American historiography in general" that mid-century readers would have brought to their reading of the text. More broadly, Reising's narratological focus on "loose ends," on gaps, "incoherences, elisions" and struggles that "cluster within the concluding lines, pages, or moments of" the works that he treats and that "thrust into our consideration...various social antagonisms" resonates with this project's focus on narrative gaps and ruptures (ix-x).

⁸⁴ See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting: 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ See John T. Flanagan, *James Hall: Literary Pioneer of the Ohio Valley* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1941), 92-93. See also Elizabeth Renker, "'A _____!': Unreadability in *The Confidence Man*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville* ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge:

Hall's tales of Moredock through Noble echoes the frequent repetition, the seriality, of the actual James Hall's words in print, as it ironically points to the repetition of stock narratives that uphold an American master narrative.

The established nature of these stories, repeated and believed, is exemplified in the rehearsed nature of Noble's retelling within the "Indian-hating" chapters. Noble begins his account by telling the cosmopolitan that, "In every company being called upon to give this history, which none could better do, the judge at last fell into a style so methodic, you would have thought he spoke less to mere auditors than to an invisible amanuensis; seemed talking for the press...I can render you the judge upon the colonel almost word for word."⁸⁶ In assuring his listener of the accuracy of his repetition, Noble creates an image of a methodical automaton talking "for the press," depicting Hall as a popular literary hack while at the same time conjuring an image of a type of history that is thoughtlessly repeated because it suits teller and listener or reader.

Indeed, in some ways the Indian-hating chapters become as much about the Judge's methodical repetition as about anything else. "The Judge always began in these words..." Noble starts, sprinkling reminders of this set performance throughout his narrative with other comments like, "The Judge would continue," or "At this point, the judge would pause, and lifting his hand, and rolling his eyes..." or "Here the judge, not unaffected, would pause again, but presently resume."⁸⁷ Recounting history is a scripted, performative act here. The boundaries of the narrative are firmly set, as is the manner in which the narrative is related.

Cambridge University Press, 1998), 129, and Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 86-87.

⁸⁶ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 148.

⁸⁷ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 148, 149, 154, 156.

That this performance may be just that – a performance - and that there may be a gap between what “actually” happened and what is being related is occasionally suggested by Noble’s recitation. At one point Noble, channeling the Judge, admits, “all this is less advanced as truths of the Indians than as examples of the backwoodsman’s impression of them.”⁸⁸ That the “backwoodsman’s impression” is crafted by the Judge, the historian, is made clear by the stranger’s quip, “Not that the backwoodsman ever used those words, you see, but the Judge found him expression for his meaning.”⁸⁹ There is a kind of understated linguistic violence in this comment. The backwoodsman’s meaning is no longer his own – indeed it may never have truly been known - as the Judge finds words with which to express that meaning, an act that subtly overwrites any original words and meaning. The backwoodsman’s meaning is the Judge’s/historian’s meaning masquerading as belonging to the backwoodsman.

Awareness of this fact pulls us back to a more recognizably insidious moment very early in the novel when the confidence man, in the form of the man with the weed in his hat, works to convince “Henry Roberts, forwarding merchant, of Wheeling, Virginia” that they met six years earlier and that Roberts had invited him home for tea.⁹⁰ “I will with pleasure supply the void in your memory by more minutely rehearsing the circumstances of our acquaintance,” the confidence man cloyingly offers before playing the standard con-man game of gaining the merchant’s trust and then offering him inside knowledge of valuable “stocks.”⁹¹ Glancing at this sentence quickly, a reader surmises that the confidence man will fill the void in the merchant’s memory with fabrications about a past that did not exist. Closer attention to the phrase “supply the void” indicates play with the notion that the confidence man not only intends to fill the void –

⁸⁸ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 152.

⁸⁹ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 155.

⁹⁰ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 27.

⁹¹ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 28.

to make up for a deficiency – but that he is supplying the void in the first place by creating it. The confidence man’s phrasing ironically leads the reader over a void created by wordplay, supplying one level of meaning that is undercut by another. Supplying the “void in your memory” by filling in something that is lacking, but also by creating that lack in the first place looks suspiciously like the Judge finding “expression” for the woodsman’s meaning – meaning which may or may not have existed in the first place. Trusting others to tell a tale, or trusting the tale told by others, is as problematic in the “Indian-hating” section of the novel as in the portions of the novel that deal with the confidence man’s deception much more explicitly.

Elizabeth Renker, focusing on the word “impression” in the quote above concerning the “backwoodsman’s impression,” and on play with the root “press” in this section of the novel, highlights the resonances of printing associated with these terms and their suggestion “that the Indian is known only as a text written by the backwoodsman from a text written by Hall in a text written by Melville.”⁹² Melville’s “emphasis on the inescapable layers of fiction associated with these racialized figures,” Renker claims, “ironizes the stereotypes that fed such enterprises as Indian-hating.”⁹³ What is more, these episodes ironize the idea of firm, knowable histories, whether of Indian-hating or otherwise, at the same time that they play with seriality, both in print and in the process of settlement, which claims linearity but is, in fact, perpetually, repetitively unsettled, turning back on itself in its own layers of fiction.

Just as Poe’s fictional version of himself refused to fill the “vacuum” in *Pym*’s final note, instead plunging the reader back into the novel’s interior, into its chasms, *The Confidence-Man*’s “Indian-hating” episodes trouble the notion of “supplying the void” in a collective memory through narratives rehearsed, plotted, memorized, and firmly known – narratives that surmise a

⁹² Renker, 129.

⁹³ Renker, 129.

complete story or an ideal from what exists or what existed. This is hinted at in Noble's comments on "the diluted Indian-hater" who escapes to civilization every so often, or visits an Indian camp for companionship. "For the diluted Indian-hater," Noble pontificates, "although the vacations he permits himself impair the keeping of the character, yet, it should not be overlooked that this is the man who, by his very infirmity, enables us to form surmises, however inadequate, of what Indian-hating in its perfection is."⁹⁴ Although the Indian-hater *par excellence* is elsewhere admitted not to exist, here we are told that the ideal type *can* be imagined from a partial version. The void can be supplied, and can be neatly packaged and repeated as it fits into larger narratives. But by this point in the novel we, as readers, have been trained to recognize that surmising "perfection" is a doomed enterprise, creating confidence where none can truly exist.

The neatness of the packaged and repeated histories that Hall provides Noble, that Noble offers to the cosmopolitan, and that Melville offers to the reader is opposed not only by an ironic attitude toward Hall in the Indian-hating section of the novel, but also by an idea expressed repeatedly throughout the text – the idea that anything too neat cannot be real. "The best false teeth are those made with at least two or three blemishes, the more to look like life," the novel's narrator quips of Noble's "singularly good" teeth, immediately associating him, and thus the tales he will tell, with something too polished, too neat, and too ideal.⁹⁵ Clear histories related as true and repeated exactly as another would relate them, and types perfected and reproduced whether through supposition admitted or ignored, are suspect. As Melville wrote in a letter to

⁹⁴ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 157.

⁹⁵ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 145.

Nathaniel Hawthorne years earlier in 1851, “truth is ever incoherent.”⁹⁶ It follows that something too coherent must be untrue.

This notion is explored most fully in an earlier chapter humorously titled “Worth the Consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering.” This chapter takes issue with the idea of knowable types, whether of Indian-hater or Indian, and, by extension, of historical typologies. We ought to be suspicious, the chapter begins, of consistent characters for, “while to all fiction is allowed some play of invention, yet, fiction based on fact should never be contradictory to it; and is it not a fact, that, in real life, a consistent character is a *rara avis*?”⁹⁷ The chapter ends with an example not of verbal or written representation, but of geographic representation – one of two places in the novel where maps are mentioned and one of a few places where the layout of a town or the organization of space appears. When we remember that the conflicts of the Indian-hating chapters are conflicts that begin with the encroachments of the backwoodsman onto Indian land – that Mrs. Moredock had “joined a company about to remove to the new country of Illinois,” that the Wrights and Weavers whose story Noble also tells “had been lured to their lonely resting-place by the ever beckoning seductions of a fertile and virgin land” - these moments of geographic representation become linked to the issues of historical plotting raised in Noble’s tale of Hall’s tale of Moredock’s tale, and to the “emplotment” of Sauk and Fox land.⁹⁸

“After poring over the best novels professing to portray human nature,” we are told at the beginning of the chapter “Worth the Consideration,” “the studious youth will still run risk of being too often at fault upon actually entering the world; whereas, had he been furnished with a true delineation, it ought to fare with him something as with a stranger entering, map in hand,

⁹⁶ Melville to Hawthorne, November [17?] 1851.

⁹⁷ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 75.

⁹⁸ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 158; 153.

Boston town; the streets may be very crooked, he may often pause; but, thanks to his true map, he does not hopelessly lose his way.”⁹⁹ A messy, complex map of a city whose layout is notoriously twisted and complicated, this chapter insists, is truer in its depiction of reality than one that has been cleaned up and simplified. A representation that is easily knowable will ultimately deceive.

In her reading of the novel’s map images Yvonne Elizabeth Pelletier asserts that the Boston map’s message that obscurity is truth reflects back on the novel’s first map, that of the “new and thriving city” of New Jerusalem, “founded by certain fugitive Mormons...on the Mississippi” in northern Minnesota.¹⁰⁰ The confidence man’s attempt to sell lots in this paradise settled by “two fugitives, who had swum over naked from the opposite shore,” perhaps suggesting John Bunyan’s Christian and Faithful as editorial notes to the novel sometimes suggest, but also referencing fugitive slaves, is a parody of both fraudulent land speculation and of the providential myth of an open America to be settled with high ideals, with a “perpetual fountain” and with twenty lyceums represented by twenty asterisks.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 76-77. The convoluted map of Boston is implicitly contrasted with the description of the orderly layout of the emigrants quarters offered at the beginning of the next chapter: “As with the nests in the geometrical towns of the associate penguin and pelican, these bunks were disposed with Philadelphian regularity” (78).

¹⁰⁰ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 58.

¹⁰¹ Numerous editions of *The Confidence-Man* suggest *Pilgrim’s Progress*, as well as Adam and Eve, as a source for the image of the “two fugitives,” but they do not raise the question of slavery. Indeed, a focus on the economics of land swindles in this episode, on Biblical connotations, and on potential references to the founding of Nauvoo, Illinois by Mormons in 1840 has ignored the ironic resonances of the particular term “fugitive.” It is notable that the first town settled by free African Americans (in the early 1830s) was named New Philadelphia and was located twenty miles from the Mississippi River in Illinois, again not far from the land of the Sauk and Fox nations. “Free Frank” McWorter bought land in Pike County, Illinois after purchasing the freedom of sixteen family members. He planned a town, registered it, and sold lots. The town was legally dissolved in 1885, reverted to farmland, and has only recently been made a National Historic Landmark. Furthermore, 1857 saw not only the publication of *The Confidence-Man*, but was also the year that the Supreme Court ruled on the Dred Scott Case, which had made its way through the court system for the previous eleven years. Scott had moved up and down and across the Mississippi as he traveled through and lived in both slave and free states (including Illinois and Minnesota, then part of the Wisconsin Territory) with his owner in the 1830s and 40s. The Supreme

With these maps, Pelletier suggests, Melville “with a self-contradicting inconsistency, argues for faith in this conjectural space by acknowledging the limitations of personal experience as a gauge of what is true.”¹⁰² “One’s inability to see how investing on the basis of specious evidence is essential to bringing the real New Jerusalem into being does not mean it will not occur,” she concludes, reading the confidence man himself as “a prophet of potential and a maker of promises” who “presents arguments for trust that smooth over the doubts that interfere with the economic mobility and geographical development necessary to the success of the democracy on a broader national scale.”¹⁰³ It is true that the confidence man is neither all bad, nor all good. It is true that Melville seems to revel in the confidence man’s tenacity and adaptability, and the tenacity and adaptability of certain other characters. Yet finding faith in the “economic mobility and geographical development necessary to the success” of democracy in the confidence man’s actions and in the representation of New Jerusalem is not in keeping with the skepticism and instability of the rest of the novel. More appropriately, the messy map of Boston is truer, and the one that looks too good to be true probably is.

Significantly, the deception involved in the representation of New Jerusalem is linked not only to its liminal positioning along the Mississippi, a line of movement and of providential promises, but also to a shifting, misleading relationship between water and land. “These marginal squares here, are they the water-lots?” asks the collegian who the confidence man

Court ruling that slaves were private property, even in free states, gave the lie to the notion that the region of the former Northwest Territory offered any kind of freedom in a practical way. While neither of these instances involves “fugitives” per se, the resonances of an idealized New Jerusalem on the Mississippi founded by “fugitives” reach deeper than issues of land speculation, of religious sects, and of an ironic attitude toward the providential myth of American for white citizens. This episode simultaneously ironizes the myth of freedom as it pertains to an actual and imaginary geography of freedom and slavery.

¹⁰² Yvonne Elizabeth Pelletier, “False Promises and Real Estate: Land Speculation and Millennial Maps in Herman Melville’s *Confidence Man*,” in *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500-1900* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 201.

¹⁰³ Pelletier, 201; 202.

attempts to interest in the development scheme. “Water-lots in the city of New Jerusalem? All terra firma...” the confidence man assures him, referring to scams in which lots represented and sold as land turn out to be swamps and simultaneously raising awareness of the deceptions involved in solidifying something fluid. The neat squares of the map that profess to all be terra firma, “bona fide,” should raise suspicion, as should any water that appears too clear. “If these waters of human nature can be so readily seen through, it may be either that they are very pure or very shallow,” the narrator reflects immediately before offering the image of the Boston map.¹⁰⁴ The muddled map, the murky water – those are, Melville contends, the “incoherent truth.”

The link between the emplotment of land into neat squares, all “bona fide” “terra firma” and the commentary on historical emplotment made through the character of the fictional Hall come together in Noble’s statement that he will begin his recitation of the Judge’s tales with “some reconnoitering of the ground in a philosophical way the judge always deemed indispensable with strangers.”¹⁰⁵ This image of tracing and re-tracing physical boundaries – of reconnoitering, of surveying - in the context of relating tales that will operate predominantly though well-trodden narrative paths makes the link between enclosed land and clearly plotted histories explicit. Only two pages earlier, the confidence man, in the form of Frank Goodman had incredulously asked:

Hate Indians? Why should he or anybody else hate Indians? *I* admire Indians. Indians I have always heard to be one of the finest of the primitive races, possessed of many heroic virtues. Some noble women, too. When I think of Pocahontas, I am ready to love Indians. Then there’s Massasoit, and Philip of Mount Hope, and Tecumseh, and Red-Jacket, and Logan – all heroes; and there’s the Five Nations...¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 76.

¹⁰⁵ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 146.

This catalog of historical figures looks very much like a list of the biographical sketches offered in McKenney and Hall's *History*, a book in which Indian lives, including Black Hawk's, are bounded in short narratives, their images contained by the four sides of lithograph plates. In Goodman's exclamation, as elsewhere, it is made clear that idolization of these figures known only through stereotypical tales is as problematic as "Indian-hating" – that the truth is more complex than this catalog of lives can provide. It is such "reconnoitering of the ground" that is parodied in the Indian-hating portion of *The Confidence-Man*, as the usurpation of land is linked to the unselfconscious emplotment of types and of histories.

The stasis of the "Indian-hating" chapters with their well-known plot conventions of massacre leading to lifelong revenge are challenged by *The Confidence-Man*'s fragmented fluidity and its tone of narrative nihilism. What might seem to be a recapitulation of the novel of frontier violence, either as a mocking critique or a troubling empty repetition, is in fact an ironic comment on larger historical metanarratives and conventions of emplotment in a novel that simultaneously destabilizes widely held notions of place and progress. While Melville is certainly playing deconstructive games, he is also critiquing the kind of historical master narratives and hero-worship of historical figures that naturalized violence against indigenous peoples by naturalizing stories of Manifest Destiny and American "greatness." The stereotype of the Indian hater and the violence associated with that stereotype becomes linked to the emplotment of land as property, and to the emplotment of land as it intersects with the creation of a national narrative, in a text that itself defies physical and narrative plotting. The novel leaps from port to port, character to character in a space at once quintessentially American and undefined. And it superimposes, or conjoins, other times and places onto mid-nineteenth-

century America, destabilizing a narrative of linear, providential progress through images of repetition, seriality, and overlap that will be explored in the texts considered in the next chapter.¹⁰⁷ It thus enacts tensions between bounding present experiences and accounts of the past in conventional packages in order to make them knowable, and resistant alternative conceptions of place, space, and the past. As Lewis and Clark went west to plot and emplot based on Euro-American conventions but met with alternative conceptions of space, struggling to position themselves within a legible narrative and geography, Black Hawk's *Life* and *The Confidence-Man* unsettle attempts to emplot land and narratives of lives within pre-set conventions.

Crossing and re-crossing the geographical fracture of the Mississippi River, these texts harness that gap to resist and critique Euro-American territorial and narrative enclosure, and to disrupt a narrative of providential progress associated with that space. Noble's "reconnoitering of the ground in a...way the Judge always deemed indispensable with strangers" suggests the physical and narrative emplotment of dispossession that is inextricable from Indian removal, warfare, and "Indian-hating," but that emplotment is challenged by the fluid forms of these Mississippi narratives.

¹⁰⁷ The novel's very first sentence, for example, compares the arrival of "a man in cream-colors, at the waterside in the city of St. Louis" to the appearance of Manco Capac, mythical founder of the Incan Empire "at the lake Titicaca" (9). This is, of course, the same Manco Capac who features in Joel Barlow's *The Columbiad*, mentioned in the previous chapter. Melville too harnesses an indigenous American past, but to challenge rather than to shore up America's own imperial myths.

Chapter Four:
Serial Fictions and Panoramic Pasts:
Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*, Lippard's *'Bel of Prairie Eden*
and Egan's *Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*

When Capitola Black, the heroine of E.D.E.N. Southworth's serialized novel *The Hidden Hand or, Capitola the Madcap* (1859), is "rescued" from her cross-dressing adventures in the streets of the Bowery and brought to a Virginia plantation by her benefactor, Major Warfield, his housekeeper, Mrs. Condiment, tells Capitola, "the only tolerable room I can put you in is the room with the trap-door – if you would not object to it?"¹ Rather than objecting, Capitola is fascinated by the "large *drop* some four feet square" secured by a "short iron bolt" and hidden by an "old Turkey rug...laid before the fireplace."² And she is fascinated by the story of deception and violence that Mrs. Condiment offers to explain the trap-door's origins.

The housekeeper tells Capitola that the bedroom is in the oldest part of Hurricane Hall, a mansion situated in "one of the loneliest and wildest of the mountain regions of Virginia."³ According to Mrs. Condiment, that part of the mansion was originally a pioneer hunting lodge dating from the "old French and Indian war." The lodge was on a "grant of land given to the *Le Noirs*" and the first owner, Henri Le Noir, had the concealed drop "made as a trap for the Indians."⁴ Le Noir was on friendly terms with the small local tribe, Mrs. Condiment continues, but "half a dozen warriors" opposed his plan to buy a large tract of land. So Le Noir invited those six warriors to a feast and, bringing them together on a blanket over the trap-door to "swear

¹ E.D.E.N. Southworth, *The Hidden Hand or, Capitola the Madcap* ed. Joanne Dobson (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 71.

² Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 72-73.

³ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 7.

⁴ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 73.

eternal brotherhood,” he released the door, sending the men to their deaths.⁵ Years later, the murdered warriors’ sons took revenge on Le Noir’s family, killing and scalping them and dropping their bodies down the trap-door into the mysterious pit that Mrs. Condiment describes as “nothing but a great, black, deep vacuity, without bottom or sides.”⁶ Layers of bodies, of history, of conflict are said to lie beneath Capitola’s sleeping space.

When Capitola and Mrs. Condiment leave the bedroom after Mrs. Condiment has told this tale, traversing a “labyrinth of passages, stairs, empty rooms and halls” to join Major Warfield in the dining room for supper, Mrs. Condiment’s dramatic history is contradicted when Capitola asks her “uncle” what is under the trap-door in her room.⁷ Old Hurricane replies, “Oh, I don’t know – an old cave that was once used as a dry cellar, until an underground stream broke through and made it too damp – so it is said.”⁸ When Capitola protests and prepares to offer the story Mrs. Condiment has told her, the housekeeper steps on Capitola’s toes beneath the table and “dexterously change[s] the conversation.” We begin to suspect that Mrs. Condiment has been trying to frighten her new houseguest with tales of a horrible pit which, if it “*has* any bottom...is strewn with human skeletons,” unaware that Capitola does not frighten.

Capitola examines the outer walls of the house for clues about the pit early the next morning, an “autumnal morning, well adapted to dispel all clouds of mystery and superstition.” Finding nothing out of the ordinary, she decides to “think no more of it! I dare say, after all, it is nothing but a very dark cellar without window and with a well, and the story of the murders and of the skeletons, is all moonshine!”⁹ This search for the truth behind Mrs. Condiment’s tale seems wise given our sense that the housekeeper has been toying with heroine and reader

⁵ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 74.

⁶ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 73.

⁷ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 75.

⁸ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 76.

⁹ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 78.

through the sensational narrative. But Capitola's decision to "think no more of it!" simultaneously suggests a problematic denial of a history of violent dispossession said to underlie the house and the surrounding plantation. And despite Capitola's proclamation, Mrs. Condiment's tale leaves a lingering sense of unrest regarding the past and its relationship to the present, as well as a sense of plurality surrounding stories of the past.

When the trap-door and pit re-enter the narrative nearly forty chapters later, it is clear that Capitola has not, in fact, put Mrs. Condiment's story of the mysterious bottomless hole from her mind entirely. In that later chapter, which is often considered the narrative's climax, Capitola finds herself trapped in her bedroom with the villainous, yet altogether likable, Black Donald, a bandit who has been hired to kill her by the present-day Le Noir. (Capitola is the unwitting heiress of a nearby estate and Le Noir is the uncle who has dispossessed her.) Black Donald is smitten with the feisty young woman, however, and vows to make her his "wife" before doing away with her. Capitola herself is drawn to Black Donald. The two are, as many have pointed out, doubles. Yet when she finds him lurking under her bed, her quick thinking enables her to get the better of him and to protect her honor by craftily positioning him over the trap-door during a scene of domesticity (they cooperate in making eggnog) and sexualized teasing (Capitola entertains and rejects his advances to get him over the trap). When Black Donald refuses to alter his plan or to repent, Capitola reluctantly releases the door, dropping him into what she still fears to be a bottomless pit.

Donald does not disappear into a "deep vacuity, without bottom or sides," however. Instead, he is found on the floor of a cellar the next morning. Pitied by a conscience-stricken Capitola, he is retrieved by local men who stretch a ladder down into the pit. He remains in Hurricane Hall while being nursed back to health, and is then carted off to jail and sentenced to

death for his various (persistently ambiguous) crimes. (The sentence is never carried out, however, since Capitola later helps him to escape, apparently a reformed man.)

By the time Capitola releases the door beneath Black Donald, Mrs. Condiment's story of frontier violence and dispossession is all but forgotten in the dramatic scene of attempted rape and in the complex relationship between Capitola and her would-be rapist. Yet the story also lingers in the reader's mind. It lingers in Capitola's sense that once the drop is released Donald will disappear forever into a "black, deep vacuity," and in the fact that, as Amy Kaplan points out, Capitola "reenacts" and "repeats" the "founding gesture of imperial violence to protect the borders of her domestic empire and the inviolability of the female body."¹⁰ And it lingers beneath Capitola's proclamation that she "shall never occupy [the] room again" since "its associations are too full of horrors."¹¹ While this aversion to the room comes only after the episode with Black Donald, the "horrors" of Capitola's own experience echo the horrors of the past that Mrs. Condiment conjures.

If Capitola is at the center of *The Hidden Hand* as the novel's heroine - the focal point around which the dynamic narrative swirls - the pit in the middle of her name and beneath her bedroom is similarly central, structurally and thematically. The image is one that consolidates questions about race, gender, and settler violence that circulate throughout the novel at the same time that it positions different versions of hidden histories at the core of the novel's rollicking sensationalism in the fictional present. The dark depths of the pit beneath Capitola's bedroom persistently intersect with the surface of the American landscape through which the heroine and various villains move. Capitola's status as the unsuspecting "sole inheritrix" of the Le Noir

¹⁰ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 50.

¹¹ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 398.

estate, consisting of the nearby “Hidden House, with its vast acres of fields, forests, iron and coal-mines, water-power, steam-mills, furnaces and foundries,” positions her, for example, as the beneficiary of the dispossession and violence represented by the trap-door and the pit. At the same time, however, the pit in the bedroom floor is associated with threats to Capitola’s body and “capital,” to her body as “capital,” aligning her with the very Indians from whose dispossession she eventually benefits, and with the slave labor that built and maintains Hurricane Hall, its plantation and, by extension, the surrounding industrial wealth. (She is in-between - both colonizer and colonized.) And the large tract of land supposedly gained through Henri Le Noir’s treachery, a tract of land represented by the bounds of the four-foot square door in the floor, also suggests the western territories being claimed in the novel’s present, when, late in the narrative, the action briefly drops into the scene of the U.S.-Mexico war and to explicit criticism of that particular land grab.

The pit beneath Capitola’s bedroom does not merely figure the past as past, as mysterious, and as inaccessible, then, although that sense of history is suggested by the mythic tone that Mrs. Condiment gives to her violent frontier origin story – a story that describes the past as “a black, deep vacuity.” Nor is the image merely one of repressed or ignored historical violence that threatens to return to haunt the present. Rather, the image of the dark pit collapses topographical space and historical time in a way that reminds readers that the past is not distant, but literally touches the present and recurs in the present - as the violence of the eighteenth-century Virginia frontier lies beneath the imperial ventures of the 1840s and as the dispossession of Indians is aligned with the attempted violation of female property, of female as property. This sense of reenactment and recurrence is reinforced by Capitola’s initial assertion that she is not afraid of sleeping above the drop since she has “been in too much deadly peril from the *living*

ever to fear the *dead*,” a comment that she follows with a similar one: “I am not afraid of the dead – I only dread the living, and not them much either.”¹² Of course these claims of fearlessness and freedom from superstition are part of Capitola’s character – her status as a tomboyish adventurer who goes out riding alone, challenges men to duels, and captures bandits only to release them from jail – but they also challenge the distance of Mrs. Condiment’s sensational history by pointing to the dangers that persist in the present.

Indeed, *The Hidden Hand* consistently evokes links between past and present in particular spaces – a sense of simultaneity across time, a sense of a collapse of time in a particular place. For example, when Le Noir visits Black Donald to demand that he kill Capitola, we are told that “the outlaw” rose, “taking a candle and leading the way into the adjoining room, the same in which fourteen years before old Granny Grewell and the child had been detained.”¹³ When Capitola disobeys Old Hurricane and ventures through the dangers of the Hidden Hollow and the Devil’s Punch Bowl to visit the Hidden House, we are told that she “was now, unconsciously, upon the very spot where, seventeen years before, the old nurse had been forcibly stopped and compelled to attend the unknown lady [Capitola’s mother].”¹⁴ And, as Lynette Carpenter points out, “the mirror image ‘HH’ houses, Hurricane Hall and the Hidden House” are positioned “one above the other like heaven and hell...Yet as Cap notices, to travel from one to the other requires such a doubling back as to end up virtually where one started...We might almost suspect that the passage below the trapdoor in Cap’s bedroom

¹² Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 74, 75.

¹³ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 147.

¹⁴ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 274. These two events would have happened only days apart. The discrepancy in time – one event being said to have happened fourteen years before and one seventeen years before – is just one of many discrepancies within the novel.

connects the two houses.”¹⁵ Carpenter’s reading of the “overlap” between the two houses suggests a similarity between them in that both can be seen as prisons for the women held within them, but the collapse of these houses and their “inmates” also reinforces a more pervasive sense of spatial and temporal overlap, of recurrence and repetition, within the novel – a sense most clear in the image of the mysterious pit which contains multiple pasts, and multiple stories of the past, simultaneously.

This chapter explores the historiography of conjuncture articulated by the image of Capitola’s pit, and by the popular works discussed here more generally. It is a historiography that is non-linear and that runs counter to notions of providential progress, that is associated not just with repetition over time, but with a kind of condensation and simultaneity across time and space, and with an opacity captured in the image of the trap-door and the dark pit. It is a historiography that both clarifies and complicates. It clarifies in the sense that it points to intersections denied by familiar, knowable narratives of past and present, cause and effect; it complicates in the sense that those intersections cannot easily be disentangled and narrated coherently. (This is the familiar problem of the inadequacy of language, which unfolds over linear time, to articulate concepts of simultaneity and overlap.)

I use the term historical “conjuncture” then not in the general sense of a period separating epochs but rather as a term that itself consolidates the ideas of spatial and temporal consolidation, layering, compression, and collapse associated with the space of Capitola’s pit (and seen in *Pym*’s chasms, *Edgar Huntly*’s cave, and Melville’s Mississippi), which links issues of race, gender, and settler violence in various ways and which serves as an image of both serial recurrence and simultaneity in the sense that while different events occur in the same spaces

¹⁵ Lynette Carpenter, “Double Talk: The Power and Glory of Paradox in E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*,” *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 10, no. 1 (1993), 23.

throughout *The Hidden Hand*, related events occurring in different spaces, in different times, are also brought together in the image of the pit. My use of the term nods at, but remains distinct from, Althusser's use of the word "conjuncture" in "The Errors of Classical Economics: Outline of a Concept of Historical Time" in which he argues for an understanding of historical time as heterogeneous in opposition to the homogeneous continuity of time that he finds in Hegel's writings. "The structure of the historical existence of the Hegelian social totality," according to Althusser, "allows what I propose to call an '*essential section*' (*coup d'essence*), i.e., an intellectual operation in which a *vertical break* is made at any moment in historical time, a break in the present such that all the elements of the whole revealed by this section are in an immediate relationship with one another, a relationship that immediately expresses their internal essence."¹⁶ This image of the "*vertical break*," the "*essential section*," resonates with the image of Capitola's pit as a window into a violent past, but, according to Althusser, a Hegelian vision would provide a cross-section which, as Lloyd Pratt puts it, "resembles a series of regularly spaced paving stones rising up to meet the world, and in rising to meet it, allowing the world to unfold."¹⁷ In other words, in such a "*vertical break*" relationships between points, between events, between cause and effect, are clear.

Such a linear cross-section, which Althusser claims is impossible, is precisely what is denied by the darkness of Capitola's pit, which suggests a number of intersecting times and histories – the times and histories of slavery, of frontier violence, of industrial capitalism and its wealth bound up in Capitola's person through her inheritance - but which denies linearity and clear cause and effect. At points in this chapter such a linear cross-section will be visible, as in the description of Thomas Jefferson's barrow excavation and the image of a burial mound in the

¹⁶ Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 94.

¹⁷ Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 44.

Mississippi panorama but, I argue, the ability of these images to be known as linear (vertical) histories of a place are subverted. They indicate a desire for temporal linearity that does not exist – a desire for a vision of the past in which the relationship between strata of time are clear - and they complicate and deny such a vision even as they attempt to achieve it. Althusser writes of subterranean, “*invisible* times,” of a concept of history “antipodal to the empirically visible history in which the time of all histories is the simple time of continuity and in which the ‘content’ is the vacuity of events that occur in it which one later tries to determine with dividing procedures in order to ‘periodize’ that continuity.”¹⁸ The works discussed in this chapter, in conjoining times and spaces, model such a vision of history, albeit outside of the immediate concerns of capitalism and Marxist visions of history that are Althusser’s ultimate focus. They paradoxically model and make visible the impossibility of an “empirically visible history.”

The word “conjuncture” as used in this chapter references not only the spatial and temporal collapse evident in the topographical images discussed throughout this project; it also contains within it references to the joining of objects or things, to the joining of bodies (in the meeting of persons or in marriage), and to places (in the location of a meeting or junction). The term captures not only how the texts and images discussed in this chapter bring together disparate times in the same spaces and how spaces are brought together across times, but also how characters are conjoined in various pairings standard to the kind of sensation fiction that *The Hidden Hand* epitomizes, reinforcing the overlap of time and spaces within the novel. Thus, for example, Capitola and Black Donald are linked, but along different lines from Capitola and Herbert (ultimately joined in marriage), or Capitola and her twin (joined in birth, but separated in death). The term also captures how some characters are themselves individually multivalent, conjoining a number of different racial or gender categories (as Black Donald’s name suggests

¹⁸ Althusser, 101; 103.

resonances with African-American characters and with the Black Legend, as Capitola Black/Le Noir blurs gender categories through her tomboyish tendencies and contains suggestions of African-American and French/Creole associations through her name).

In what follows I pursue this notion of historical conjuncture in *The Hidden Hand*, in George Lippard's *Bel of Prairie Eden* (1848), and in John J. Egan's moving panorama, *Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*, painted for Dr. Montroville William Dickeson around 1850. The serial form of these works – a form superficially linear and sequential as a narrative unfolds over weeks or months in a story paper, as a moving panorama unrolls before a viewer's eyes – paradoxically enables the narrative or visual repetition and return that fuels their emphasis on the simultaneity of settlement – on a historical vision that is precisely non-linear. The fragmented formal qualities of these works thus highlight the contrast between an idea of homogeneous, linear time that might be associated with the serial, composed of consecutive “numbers,” and the various resonances of conjuncture associated with Capitola's pit. In these texts and images, looking down into or over the landscape of the Americas brings not sweeping visions of spatial and temporal progress, but images of multiple temporalities and of alternative, ignored histories – histories of women, slaves, Indians. Operating through popular narrative conventions and generic expectations, these works also frequently subvert such conventions, enhancing their counter-hegemonic tone through their narrative dynamism and play. Peering into the dark pit or looking out over the landscape in these serialized novels and this Mississippi panorama brings, again and again, a desire for (sensational and historical) narrative closure that is never realized.

Serial Returns

Of course, the repetition that contributes to the sense of historical conjuncture within *The Hidden Hand* is, in many ways, inherent to gothic and sensation fiction so that one rather expects the room where Le Noir demands that Black Donald kill Capitola to be the same room in which her life was threatened as an infant; one rather expects characters and places to disappear for hundreds of pages only to suddenly return.¹⁹ In the case of *The Hidden Hand* these narrative “drops” and “returns” are also bound up in the novel’s publication history – in Southworth’s work as a serial novelist writing for a popular story paper.

Southworth wrote approximately sixty popular serialized novels over the course of her career, making her one of the most prolific nineteenth-century American authors. *The Hidden Hand* was, uniquely, published serially three times (in the United States alone) before being published in book form in 1888. After its first appearance in the *New York Ledger* the paper’s savvy publisher, Robert Bonner, retained the copyright and the novel appeared in the pages of that paper again in 1868 and 1883. The work itself recurred in the same venue, in the same narrative space, at different moments in time. Yet, as Chris Looby points out, few discussions of *The Hidden Hand* take this history of seriality into account in a significant way. While most essays on the novel mention the fact of its publication history, few reflect on the implications: for the first twenty-nine years of the novel’s existence, readers were only able to encounter it in fragments and, unless someone saved each copy of the *Ledger* in which chapters appeared so that it could be read sequentially in its entirety, readers would have to wait a week for the suspenseful ending of one “number” to be resolved in the next. The novel’s action was, quite literally, suspended over a rupture at regular intervals.

¹⁹ Fiona Robertson puts it succinctly in a parenthetical aside in *Legitimate Histories*: “Gothic is nothing if not repetitive” (69).

The mid-nineteenth century was, of course, the era of the serial. Magazines and story papers often ran multiple serialized novels at the same time so that when one concluded readers were already invested in reading another. Novels by Dickens and Thackeray were published in stand-alone installments. The absence of international copyright law meant that serialized novels were reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic, another kind of repetition facilitating financial “return.”²⁰ Serialized novels were not new, however. They had existed in a recognizably “modern” form since the 1730s, and eighteenth-century British novels (among them *Tom Jones*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Clarissa*) had self-consciously toyed with the temporal implications of the serial form, even when not published serially.²¹ Playing with disjunctures between narrative time, story time, and the time of reading, such novels complicated the orderly linearity associated with the basic concept of the “serial” as a sequential, chronological series.²² It is often assumed, however, that by the mid-nineteenth century, the serial form was a “commercial convenience” - a product of the capitalist machine - and that the resulting works suffer from having been written rapidly, in a constrained format, under deadline, and in dialogue with contemporary events and reactions to the first published numbers rather than as a kind of independent art reflecting an

²⁰ See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*; Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

²¹ For example, Edward Cave’s London periodical, the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, founded in 1731, featured novels in installments. As Patricia Okker points out, not only was this periodical the first to use the term “magazine” for a collection of articles and stories, but its motto, “*E pluribus unum*,” emphasizing a whole made up of parts, became America’s motto. See Okker, *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 1-2. Okker’s focus on the unifying social collectivity of reading serialized novels (in keeping with Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities”) is an important one, but stands in contradiction to the historical polyvocality and disjuncture that I discuss in relationship to the form in this chapter. Serialized stories also, of course, existed much earlier in narratives such as *One Thousand and One Nights* and *The Decameron*.

²² See Tom Keymer, “Reading Time in Serial Fiction before Dickens,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 30, (2000), 34-45, for a brief discussion of disruptions to “reading time” in such novels.

author's unified vision.²³ The rhetoric surrounding serialized fiction can sometimes seem gothic or grotesque itself, associated with a kind of Bakhtinian excess and polyvocality. Gérard Genette, for example, characterizes serialization as a matter of “disadvantages...presenting the public first with a disfigured text,” a text full of holes and excisions, “pending publication in book form.”²⁴

There is no doubt that these texts often seem sprawling and disorganized, riddled with slight inconsistencies that may have escaped the author as he or she wrote for deadlines. And Southworth, for one, certainly wrote with her public in mind, remaining committed to crafting individual installments that would capture readers' imaginations and leave them longing for more. She clearly wanted to be a popular writer. Yet negotiating the relationship between the spatial constraints of each serial installment, her desire to keep her reader's interest from one week to the next, and the narrative that she felt she needed to tell – the “plot” that already existed in her head - was an ongoing challenge. “I did intend to end that number with the mysterious disappearance of the bride who is supposed to be assassinated on her wedding night,” Southworth wrote in May 1862 as she worked on her novel *Astrea, or the Bridal Day*. “But it was necessary to give a little of the family history before hand, and I dwelt too long upon that; so that I did not even arrive at the marriage of my heroine, much less at her abduction.”²⁵ She goes on to say that she will rewrite the number so that it includes the “thrilling incident” if Bonner wants her to do so. She had herself hoped to include it, in keeping with her sense of readers'

²³ See John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995; 2006) for a definition of serial fiction as “the division of narrative into separately issued instalments, usually for commercial convenience but occasionally for art” (86).

²⁴ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (1987; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 406. Such notions privilege a problematic notion of unity associated with the novel or book form that diminishes the status of other publication forms though, as Chris Looby notes, this has begun to change in the field of Early American Literature (See Christopher Looby, “Southworth and Seriality: *The Hidden Hand* in the *New York Ledger*,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59, no. 2 (September 2004), 183, n.7).

²⁵ E.D.E.N. Southworth to Robert Bonner, May 26, 1862. Southworth papers, Duke University Library.

desires, but the requirements of the narrative, of the “family history,” exceeded the bounds of the physical space allotted.

In another letter, probably written in December of 1863, Southworth personifies the novel that she is writing, indicating that it has a life of its own and that its conclusion cannot be rushed without great harm to its organic being: “I have done my very best to crowd the remaining portion of ‘Self-Made’ into this last number. But I find I can not lay my giant on this bed of Procrustes, by any process of cramping; I should have to mutilate him, by cutting off his feet. In other words I can not finish ‘Self Made’ in one number, without destroying the harmonious proportions of the whole work... I hope it will not make much difference if I finish it in the 53rd number instead of the 52nd as I hoped.”²⁶ Again, she concludes by leaving the decision to Bonner, but it seems that he did not generally interfere. While Southworth shaped her writing to the demands of serial publication, her stories were also often allowed to grow as she felt necessary. The resulting novels, like *The Hidden Hand*, are at once sprawling and oddly contained and constrained. Working to anticipate and satisfy readers’ desires while telling the story that she needed to tell in the space allotted to tell it, Southworth’s serialized fictions negotiate collapses and elongations of narrative time and space.

As one of the most familiar gothic conventions within *The Hidden Hand* the image of the trap-door and the pit, which itself collapses time and space, reaches into the reader’s present (as well as into the present of the narrative action) as it reflects the tensions between narrative expectations and their subversion that characterizes the novel. When Mrs. Condiment introduces Capitola, and readers, to the trap-door we assume that the drop will factor into the plot. Drawing on expectations gleaned from the tradition of British gothic texts, as well as from other

²⁶ E.D.E.N. Southworth to Robert Bonner, [Dec. 1863?], E.D.E.N. Southworth papers, Duke University Library.

sensational tales, we might imagine that the trap-door will pose some threat to Capitola herself. But, at the beginning of the novel at least, readers might not foresee a moment when the heroine will send a brawny man who stands “six feet eight inches in his boots” hurtling down into the hole.²⁷ Among its many resonances, then, the pit comes to represent the way the novel thwarts our own readerly expectations even as it sets them up and tries to accommodate them – the way we may often feel that we are ourselves falling through a trap set for us by the author’s hidden hand.

Though sensational stereotypes like the trap-door are complicated in *The Hidden Hand*, the drop, its association with violent murders, and its role in a scene of threatened rape in particular, encapsulates the sensationalism that helped to make the novel so popular, but that led Southworth’s works to be ignored or lambasted by contemporary critics.²⁸ Popular sensationalism rather ironically pushed Southworth and her writings, like those of contemporaries such as George Lippard, to the periphery of both academic consideration and general literary awareness for most of the twentieth century.

In a letter dated December 26, 1856, Henry Peterson, editor of the *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post* where Southworth was publishing her writings at the time, warned her of the

²⁷ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 143.

By the end of the eighteenth-century the Gothic convention of a girl being captivated by underground rooms or passages was so standard that a 1797 “recipe” for Gothic in the British *Monthly Magazine* included the provision: “The rooms *up stairs* may be just habitable, and no more; but the principal incidents must be carried on in *subterraneous* passages. These, in general, wind wound the whole extent of the building; but that is not very material, as the heroine never goes through above half without meeting with a door, which she has neither strength nor resolution to open, although she has found a rusty key, very happily fitted to as rusty a lock, and would give the world to know what it leads to, and yet she can give no reason for her curiosity” (“Terrorist System of Novel Writing,” signed “A Jacobin Novelist,” *Monthly Magazine*, iv (August 1797), 104).

²⁸ See Linda Naranjo-Huebl, “The Road to Perdition: E.D.E.N. Southworth and the Critics,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 16, no. 2 (2006): 123-150.

dangers of sensational tales, explicitly comparing her to Lippard. “This week’s installment would not do without great alterations – indeed it would not,” reprimanded Peterson:

It would have ruined both you and the Post. Do not, for Heaven’s sake, fall into your old blunder again. That free vein of your earlier writings injured you as you cannot confute – and now that Heaven in its mercy has given you a second chance, do not madly throw it away. Solon Robinson and his Hot Corn were killed by the same error – the sale of that work was ruined in a very short time. George Lippard had genius – but it killed both his works and, literally speaking, himself. Even now the great objection made to your works is that very thing – notwithstanding all my remonstrances. For in your books you reinsert sometimes what I had omitted.²⁹

By “that very thing” Peterson means sensational or licentious details deemed unfit for family reading - details that he would omit in his editing of Southworth’s stories. (It is tempting to imagine *The Hidden Hand*’s pit as an omission – a lack – that perversely introduces the very sensationalism Peterson feared and warned against.)

In a letter sent to Southworth years earlier in 1849, Peterson had explained the *Post*’s boundaries when it came to publishing material that might be considered scandalous:

If you read the Post, you will know that it is conducted in no straight-laced system. I bear in mind of course that what I publish is to be read by wives and daughters and children – but I have yet to learn that husbands and fathers should read papers which they would not be willing to place in the hands of a girl of sixteen. And do you think, my dear madam, that any writer ought to write that – perhaps I ought to say any novel writer - which is not suitable to place on the parlour table of a family, to be read by young and old?

On the principles on which I conduct the Post, I should not hesitate to insert anything ever written (to my present recollection) by Scott, or Dickens, or the Miss Porter, or Maria Edgeworth, or Miss Martinsaw[sic], or Frederika Bremer, or Cooper, or Irving, or Miss Sedgwick – but there are one or two novels of Bulwer’s, those of Eugene

²⁹ Henry Peterson to E.D.E.N. Southworth, December 26, 1856, E.D.E.N. Southworth papers, Duke University Library. “Solon Robinson and his Hot Corn” refers to that author’s *Hot Corn: Life Scenes of New York Illustrated* published in 1845. *Hot Corn* was one of many works published in the 1830s and 40s “intended to promote temperance and virtue, to lift up the lowly, to expose to open day the hidden effects produced by Rum, to give narratives of misery suffered by the poor of the city” (v). This, of course, also made it subject to critiques of licentiousness. George Lippard’s sensational, gothic reform novels met with similar criticism. Lippard died in 1854 at the age of 31.

Sue's, most of George Sand's, which I could not publish. This to show that our paper is not bounded by such narrow limits, that true genius cannot find room for its wings.³⁰

In the 1856 letter Peterson implies that Southworth is in danger of falling ("Do not, for Heaven's sake, fall into your old blunder again") into the 1849 letter's latter group (Bulwer, Sue, and Sand, to which he would, by 1856, add Lippard), if she did not follow his advice for altering her plots and guarding the morality of her tales. By this time, in late 1856, Peterson's tense editorial relationship with Southworth was already over however, for all intents and purposes. She was being pursued by Robert Bonner and beginning February 1, 1857 had an exclusive contract with his *New York Ledger*, a relationship that would, famously, last for thirty years and offer her a tremendous amount of authorial freedom (as well as a much higher rate of pay than she had previously received). Southworth's novels written for Bonner and the *Ledger*, *The Hidden Hand* among them, were tremendously popular as they mixed the sensational with a sense of moral righteousness and social critique that Peterson appears not to have grasped or appreciated.³¹ What Bonner knew was that Southworth's tales sold papers and that Southworth was eager to give Bonner's readers what they desired.

Southworth's extreme popularity eventually did put her on a long list of forgotten nineteenth-century authors whose serialized fictions were considered hastily written and unworthy of attention, however. She herself dropped out of the story of nineteenth-century American literature. Only in the past few decades has she been "recovered." Critics have begun

³⁰ Henry Peterson to E.D.E.N. Southworth, September 10, 1849, E.D.E.N. Southworth papers, Duke University Library.

³¹ Carpenter notes, "Dobson, Habegger and Susan Coultrap-McQuin describe the moral backlash against Southworth by more conservative Christians, such as Sarah Josepha Hale and *Saturday Evening Post* publisher Henry Peterson. Coultrap-McQuin writes: 'We can guess that these criticisms galled Southworth, who considered herself to be a Christian woman with the best of moral intentions as a writer...Southworth believed that moral lessons could be taught by presenting right in contrast to wrong, whereas Peterson felt that even a hint of wrong would corrupt the reader'" (Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 65, quoted in Carpenter, 29-30, n. 10). See also Looby, 184, n.9.

to reconsider her “radicalism of the center,” as Alfred Habegger puts it in his 1981 essay “A Well Hidden Hand,” one of the first pieces of criticism to revisit the novel. “The fringe is easy to deal with,” Habegger continues, “but popular radicalism is the one thing the Serious Literature Profession long ago agreed never to countenance.”³² Since the early 1980s literature espousing a popular “radicalism of the center” has, of course, itself come to the center of critical discourse as studies of dime-novels, penny papers, and various popular genres have proliferated. Yet the tension between the popular sensationalism of serialized novels by authors like Southworth and Lippard and the social critiques so often embedded within those popular forms continues to complicate thinking about works by these writers.

The trap-door, the pit, and the ambiguities surrounding it – the multiple stories told of it within the novel, from Mrs. Condiment’s violent tale of frontier conflict to Black Donald’s fall onto the cellar floor – hover at *The Hidden Hand*’s center, epitomizing the popular “center” in their stereotypical sensationalism. Yet, like so many aspects of the novel, that stereotype is subverted, raising “radical” questions not only about hidden histories of imperial violence and their recurrence in the present, but also about larger problematics of truth telling, of power dynamics, of who speaks for whom, and about the stories of those who are often silenced. As threats to female bodies, honor, and property are conjoined with histories, landscapes, and territories, the dynamism of telling tales about the past is enacted in the form of the popular sensation novel where characters and details drop away only to return in episodes of unexplained coincidence, and where relationships between cause and effect are not always clear.

³² Alfred Habegger, “A Well Hidden Hand,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 14, no. 3 (1981 Spring), 201. This essay is, of course, now quite dated and while it brings *The Hidden Hand* into critical conversations it also includes troubling judgments such as that *The Hidden Hand* is “Southworth’s only good novel” (201).

“Lay(er)ing the Ghoses”

If the serial origins of *The Hidden Hand* are evident in the novel’s shifting pace and its “cliffhanger” chapter endings, these origins are also evident in its status as a “traveling text” – an episodic narrative that moves in its formal dynamism. Characters themselves travel through various spaces. Capitola moves from Virginia, where she is born, to the streets of New York, where she is raised by the mulatta Granny Grewell after Le Noir’s attempt to sell the infant and nurse into slavery, and back to Virginia, where she takes rides through the woods around Hurricane Hall, much to the chagrin of Old Hurricane. The action of the novel as a whole moves not just between Virginia and New York with Capitola, however, but also through Washington D.C., Baltimore, the West (St. Louis), Mexico, and New Orleans. And the reader sometimes “travels” across narrative space with the narrator, entering a house (“You enter by the little wooden gate, pass up the mouldering, paved walk...”) or taking the “fast boat” from the countryside near New Orleans back to Virginia to rejoin Capitola and her adventures (“And now, dear reader, let you and me take the fast boat, and get home before them to see our little Cap.”).³³ Negotiating the ruptures between serial installments, between narrative episodes, and between the many narrative spaces within the text results in a constant sense of movement on the part of the reader.

This sense of narrative travel and movement is in keeping with the novel’s engagement with the traditions of the *Bildungsroman* and the Quixotic quest plot. As the story of an orphan girl who is wronged by her conniving uncle and eventually restored to her rightful social position, the novel follows basic narrative formulas. But these narrative formulas, standard to the male quest plot and, by the mid-nineteenth century, often adapted to reflect challenges facing

³³ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 62, 464.

women and girls, are complicated through Capitola's brash adventurousness.³⁴ She is not a meek orphan girl quietly struggling to be good and to do good. Rather, she is a brash spitfire always ready for an escapade. The daughter of a French freedom fighter, Capitola is an image of liberty and, in frequent references to Capitola as "a bit of a Don Quixote," as a knight errant riding around the countryside with Old Hurricane's slave Wool as her comic sidekick, she is explicitly associated with traditions of the picaresque and the quest.³⁵ Capitola cannot stay still, and *The Hidden Hand* consistently reflects this movement.

This narrative and geographical dynamism is explicitly connected to the boundary crossing and blurring of gender and race that characterizes the novel. To figure Capitola as "a bit of a Don Quixote" and elsewhere as Old Hurricane's "little Donna Quixota" is to explicitly challenge borders and conventions of gender.³⁶ When *The Hidden Hand* first reentered critical awareness in the 1980s the focus was on this subversion of gender norms – on how Capitola rails against femininity, doing whatever she wants and "being a man" when men fail to save the day. Such readings often call upon details of Southworth's biography, noting that as a single mother (separated from or abandoned by her husband) who became a highly successful author, her work frequently advocates female strength and independence. Indeed, Joanne Dobson, in her introduction to the first reissue of the novel in the twentieth-century states that Southworth's

³⁴ See Susan M. Cruce, "The Hidden Harlot: Alternative Ideals of Womanhood in 19th-Century Women's Fiction," in *Womanhood in Anglophone Literary Culture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Perspectives*, Robin Hammerman, ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 84-85, and Amy E. Hudock, "Challenging the Definition of Heroism in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (March 1995) for readings of *The Hidden Hand* in terms of female quest plot. See Veronica Stewart, "Narrative Freedom in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* or, *Capitola the Madcap*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 8, no. 2 (October 1997), 171, n. 20 for a helpful list of work on the female *Bildungsroman*. *The Hidden Hand* is frequently discussed in relationship to sentimental, moralistic female *Bildungsroman* like *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Lamplighter*. Habegger claims that the "story about a good orphan-girl who undergoes exemplary trials" contained in such novels was "the basic formula for nineteenth-century women readers" (201).

³⁵ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 269.

³⁶ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 467.

“work focuses almost exclusively on gender and gender relations” and that “for over forty years Southworth’s protagonists defined independence, integrity, and personal strength as central to a woman’s existence.”³⁷

Critics soon began to note that if male/female binaries were challenged throughout *The Hidden Hand*, black/white binaries were just as problematic. Readings of race within the novel began to supplant, and often to supplement, a focus on gender. Capitola Black was realized to not only be associated with anti-sentimental masculinity, but also with the very blackness that her name implies. Katherine Ings reads tropes of blackness in the novel as a vehicle through which the sentimental heroine exercises her independence. (An independence significantly not available to black women, however.) Patricia Okker and Jeffrey Williams explore Southworth’s ironic use of the conventions of minstrelsy to empower white women, while Michelle Ann Abate links traditions of black minstrelsy within the novel to the contemporary development of white tomboyism.³⁸

At the same time, this focus on race brought questions about Southworth’s relationship to slavery and abolition to the forefront of discussions of the novel. Although herself a Southerner who was born in Washington, D.C. and who lived there most of her life, Southworth is often seen as an abolitionist since her writings were first published in the anti-slavery periodical *The National Era* alongside writings by Harriet Beecher Stowe, since she was friends with Stowe and other abolitionists like Whittier (then corresponding editor of *The National Era*), and since she is

³⁷ Joanne Dobson, “Introduction” to *The Hidden Hand or, Capitola the Madcap* ed. Dobson, xxi, xxii. See also Habegger, Cruea, Hudock, and Stewart.

³⁸ See Katherine Ings, “Blackness and the Literary Imagination: Uncovering ‘The Hidden Hand,’” in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996): 131-50; Patricia Okker and Jeffrey R. Williams, “‘Reassuring Sounds’: Minstrelsy and *The Hidden Hand*,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1998 June): 133-44; Michelle Anne Abate, “Launching a Gender B(l)acklash: E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* and the Emergence of (Racialized) White Tomboyism,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2006 Spring): 40-64.

known to have volunteered in Union hospitals during the war and even to have housed wounded soldiers in her Georgetown cottage.³⁹ This perceived abolitionism sits uncomfortably next to the stereotypical representations of African-Americans in her writings. Many note that Southworth claimed to have gained a love of storytelling from black servants and slaves in her youth, yet despite her supposed intimate acquaintance with black men and women, she was not, as Dobson concludes, “free from the limiting prejudices of her era.”⁴⁰ (Indeed, it is difficult to read Southworth asking Bonner whether there was “too much negro talk in [her] last novel” and telling him that she generally understands the public to like such dialect.⁴¹) Here again, Southworth’s popular writing problematically collides with what present day readers might want to understand about her social and political vision.⁴²

The image of the trap-door and the pit hovers in the background of the debate about *The Hidden Hand*’s relationship to slavery as critics seek to explore and to explain a seeming absence in the novel’s political project or message. In some ways, the pit almost seems to mock such attempts as a space refusing clear meaning – as a problem without one answer. Some have interpreted the pit itself as a symbol of slavery, however – as an image that positions a

³⁹ See Regis Louise Boyle, *Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, Novelist* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1939), 15.

⁴⁰ Dobson, xxiv.

⁴¹ E.D.E.N. Southworth to Robert Bonner, [1860?], E.D.E.N. Southworth papers, Duke University Library.

⁴² Paul Christian Jones and Chris Looby have debated this collision. Jones contends that Southworth softened her abolitionism in *The Hidden Hand* to ensure that the novel would appeal to the masses, but that the novel is still gently abolitionist in its portrayal of the dangers faced by southern women involved in the perpetuation of the slave system (See Paul Christian Jones, “‘This Dainty Woman’s Hand...Red with Blood’: E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* as Abolitionist Narrative,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (March 2001): 59-80). Looby, on the other hand, claims that Southworth very carefully avoids a political stance in the novel, in keeping with the calculated ambivalence and mass appeal of the *Ledger*. According to Looby, Bonner cultivated an “apolitical neutrality” that he maintained was a political stance itself, but that conveniently also avoided turning away any potential readers, instead luring them into “an imagined public sphere of depoliticized mass entertainment” (Looby, 147). Even in 1859, a year that saw rising tensions between North and South, the *Ledger* did not take a stance on slavery, and Looby claims that Southworth fell in line with this neutrality.

controversy that the novel might seem to avoid at its very center. For example, Catherine Ings reads the hole as a kind of general hell or eternal perdition in which Black Donald deserves to suffer, but also claims that it suggests the hold of ships on the Middle Passage and so is connected to other “racially and historically inflected” pits.⁴³ By the time that Southworth wrote *The Hidden Hand*, the pit or abyss had, in fact, become a more general metaphor for the horrors and conditions of slavery, one that had moved well beyond the literal association of the ship’s hold. David Walker, in his 1829 *Appeal To the Coloured Citizens of the World*, refers to “Ignorance” as “a mist, low down into the very dark and almost impenetrable abyss in which, our fathers for many centuries have been plunged” by slavery and by the notion that “they are an *inferior and distinct race* of beings, which [white Christians] will be glad enough to recall and swallow by and by.”⁴⁴ In his 1845 *Narrative* Frederick Douglass famously reflects that literacy had given him “a view of [his] wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out.”⁴⁵

With these associations in mind, the moment when Capitola and her black housemaid Pitipat lean over the gaping hole with Capitola proclaiming “‘Come, as I’ve got a ‘pit’ in my name and you’ve got a ‘pit’ in yours, we’ll see if we two can’t make something of this third

⁴³ Ings, 145-146. This ambiguity of the pit “renders Southworth’s characterization of Black Donald ambiguous,” according to Ings. “He represents the morality of a criminal and the oppression of a slave” (146). See also H. Jordan Landry’s reading of the pit as “a metaphor for both women’s and African Americans’ bodies” in “Of Tricks, Tropes, and Trollops: Revisions to the Seduction Novel in E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*,” *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 38, 20. 2 (2005 Fall), 36.

⁴⁴ *David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 19.

⁴⁵ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. Deborah E. McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45. Recent archeological evidence suggests that the pit beneath the house has a potential resonance of resistance, however, in the idea of pits beneath slave quarters as potential places for not only storage or refuse disposal, but possibly as places for objects with spiritual value. See Patricia M. Samford, *Subfloor Pits and the Archaeology of Slavery in Colonial Virginia* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 10. This study is based on the fact that “The regular appearance of subfloor pits on post-1680 Virginia sites, combined with the tremendous numbers of Africans arriving in the Virginia colony, suggests that the use of these features was tied to the presence of Africans there and arose largely in response to the conditions of slavery” (9).

‘pit’!” seems a momentary commitment, on the part of Capitola at least, to “laying” the ghosts of slavery, as she proclaims she will do when Pitipat expresses her fear of “ghoses.” But reaching a light into the abyss “only made the horrible darkness ‘visible’.”⁴⁶ In quoting Milton, Southworth conjures a general sense of perdition, but she simultaneously alludes to the “horrible darkness” of slavery, here visible, but without a sense of a solution. The pit simultaneously suggests and denies a commitment to the issue of slavery, vaguely conjuring its relative absence in the novel. More generally, an ability to look and to see is denied here. Peering down into the pit of the past brings not clarity, but opacity, darkness.

Of course, the “ghoses” in the pit are also those of the Indian bones said to lie within its darkness – ghosts that tie the space to settler violence existing alongside of the violence of the plantation economy. Many of Southworth’s novels were set in the dramatic, fictional wilds of Maryland and Virginia as she took the landscapes of her youth and transformed them using the “stock material of exaggerated romanticism,” as an early Southworth biographer put it.⁴⁷ Southworth’s stories often involve romantic and domestic tragedy in imagined “first families” of these states, developing these spaces as ones literally positioned between a frontier past and a cultivated national future.

While *The Hidden Hand*’s landscape, sprinkled with caves and abysses in the tradition of Scott and Cooper, is obviously part of this romantic, gothic fictionalizing, its actual location is not necessarily as abstract as it might initially seem. We are told that the main town closest to Hurricane Hall is Staunton, which is the name of a town in western Virginia. Founded around 1747, Staunton immediately became a county seat and a center of trade and commercial activity

⁴⁶ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 76.

⁴⁷ Boyle, 82.

at a time when Virginia stretched far to the west, so that the association of the region with Capitola's industrial wealth is not without precedent.⁴⁸ It was an area at once wild and undergoing significant development – and an area participating in the development of the nation more generally.

Tip-Top, the small town closest to Hurricane Hall is generally assumed to be a fabricated name, in keeping with the playful appellations of characters within *The Hidden Hand* – names like Pitapat and Mrs. Condiment. Tip Top is, in fact, the name of a township in Tazewell County, Virginia, however. It is about two hundred miles from Staunton, so there is not a sense of precise geography here, but Southworth was drawing on the names of two places that are associated with the inland, mountainous region of Virginia. These parallels are not, of course, intended to suggest that Southworth meant to conjure these particular places – the novel's geography is romanticized and abstractly gothicized - but in its Virginia landscape and in its movement around the space of America the novel also blurs real spaces and histories into its sensational plot, extending the spatial and historical conjunctures within the novel into the spaces and times of the United States.⁴⁹

The story that Mrs. Condiment tells Capitola of the pit's origins is similarly mythologized and simultaneously suggestive of actual historical events, alluding to the fine line between myth and history in the past of the American nation. By the time of *The Hidden Hand*'s publication, the story of the Indian massacre in the domestic space of the frontier cabin was a well-established trope. From early captivity narratives, to the frontier novels of the early nineteenth century, to Melville's complicated use of the narrative in *The Confidence-Man*, this was a

⁴⁸ See *Encyclopedia of Virginia* (New York: Somerset Publishers, 1992), 302-303.

⁴⁹ See William C. Pendleton, *History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia, 1748-1920* (Richmond, VA: W.C. Hill Printing Company, 1920) for mention of Tiptop in the context of Tazewell County history.

recognizable tale. But as Lynette Carpenter points out, Southworth's use of the trope in Mrs. Condiment's tale "illustrates once again Southworth's method of undermining reader assumptions" in that "both the tale teller [Mrs. Condiment] and her listener [Capitola] clearly side with the unfortunate red victims of white rapaciousness...The double story includes the story behind the story, suggesting that tales of Indian savagery may not be what they seem."⁵⁰ In other words, Southworth portrays white settler violence as causing Indian violence rather than vice versa.

Locating this tale in an inland, mountainous region of Virginia also raises associations with the historical precedent of Logan and the Yellow Creek Massacre of 1774. This event occurred after the period of the French and Indian War that Southworth associates with her fictional tale of frontier violence, but captures similar issues of family, revenge, and of multiple stories about that violence. In 1774, in what is now Southeastern Ohio, a group of Virginia frontiersmen murdered members of Logan's family. Logan, a Cayuga who moved to the Ohio River valley and, along with other transplanted Iroquois, became known as a Mingo, had had friendly relations with white settlers up until that time, but now retaliated by killing a number of Virginians. (While the boundaries of the Virginia territory were unfixed at the time, Richard White claims that Logan specifically targeted Virginians and tried to spare Pennsylvanians.)⁵¹ Accounts of these events vary. In some versions the white settlers attack in retaliation for Indian violence. In some versions Logan's family members are killed in a canoe. In others the massacre occurs in the enclosed space of Baker's Tavern or "at the house of a man named Baker." (Richard White writes, "On May 3, 1774, a party of Virginians decoyed two Indian men and women from Yellow Creek across the river to drink with them at the house of a man named

⁵⁰ Carpenter, 25, 26.

⁵¹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 362.

Baker. They made them drunk and murdered them and, likewise, killed two more who followed...On other days, the visit that left them dead would have resulted in nothing more notable than a few goods' changing hands.")⁵² In most cases, the tale is told as one of individual trauma and revenge, masking the broader context of the taking of Indian lands.⁵³

Though not now a well-remembered historical event, this massacre was part of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century history of the American frontier thanks, in large part, to Thomas Jefferson's reprinting of "Logan's Lament" in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (notable for its own fragmented, serial structure of responses to Marbois' queries). Jefferson, himself much interested in the hidden histories beneath the surface of the Virginia landscape and himself a chronicler of the dramatic, gothic geography of the Virginia wilds with his descriptions of the Natural Bridge and his mapping of caves, discusses Logan and the massacre in the course of illustrating Indian "eminence in oratory."⁵⁴ Offering a history of the conflict as a preface to his reproduction of Logan's supposed speech to Lord Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, following the massacre, Jefferson uses Logan as "a testimony" of native talent. This speech, the origins of which are, of course, unknown, its veracity questionable, was "endlessly reprinted, beginning with Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* and later in the McGuffey *Readers*, and has been memorized and recited by millions of schoolchildren."⁵⁵ John Neal later took up the figure of Logan in his 1823 gothic frontier novel of that name. In the course of these repetitions, the name "Logan" became synonymous with doomed heroic brilliance, though the truth of the story did

⁵² White, 358-359.

⁵³ As Anthony Wallace puts it, "In reality, Lord Dunmore's War, though precipitated in 1774 by the massacre of Logan's family, was not about Cresap, or Logan's murdered family, or Logan's reprisals. It was about the taking of Indian land" (Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 8). See Wallace, 2-4 for a summary of details about these events and helpful references to material about Logan.

⁵⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, David Waldstreicher, ed. (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 123.

⁵⁵ Wallace, 1.

not go un-probed. In 1867, for example, historian Brantz Mayer published a book questioning the accuracy of Jefferson's account of Logan and the massacre. The variability of this history is further evident in the fact that Jefferson published an *Appendix to the Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1800 in which he reprinted "Logan's Lament" but altered the narrative of events surrounding the massacre and retaliation.⁵⁶ In invoking these historical spaces and events turned legend (the tavern or cabin, the friendly relationships gone sour), however obliquely, Southworth points to hidden histories turned popular histories that still themselves do the work of dispossession.

Jefferson's invocation of Logan, while seemingly reverential in its praise of "Logan's Lament," dispossesses in the sense that it crafts a "dying race," end-of-a-line narrative while distracting from issues of land speculation with a story of family melodrama and individual suffering. Jefferson, George Washington, and many other prominent men had interests in land companies that were moving into the western territory claimed by Virginia – areas that were exceedingly unsettled as the process of white settlement proceeded. As the Le Noir family conspired to remove Indians from the tract of land they wished to claim, so too did historical "first families" of Virginia. In the complex, often contradictory logic of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the superficially sympathetic tale of the demise of Logan's family provides room for such settlement.

What immediately follows Logan's speech in *Notes* is a reminder that Indians should not be "condemn[ed]...as wanting genius" because they have not had the time to develop that Europeans had.⁵⁷ Jefferson's use of "Logan's Lament" to assert that Indians *could* develop skills

⁵⁶ See Wallace, 5 for a summary of these changes.

⁵⁷ Jefferson, 124.

in “arts and sciences” equal to those of Europeans forms part of his argument against Buffon and Reynal’s claims of the inferiority of plants and animals in the Americas and he immediately proceeds to enumerate Euro-American successes – Washington’s in war, Franklin’s in physics, Rittenhouse’s in astronomy – as proof “that America, though but a child of yesterday, has already given hopeful proofs of genius.”⁵⁸ Logan’s history is displaced as a distant one that, while serving to illustrate the natural abilities of indigenous America, is subsumed into the promise of Euro-American greatness. Logan is positioned, temporally, before the “yesterday” of America’s childhood - part of a distant, disappearing past being assimilated into a new present and future.

Jefferson positions Indians in the past even more explicitly in *Notes*’ “Query XI: Aborigines” where he states: “I know of no such thing existing as an Indian monument: for I would not honor with that name arrow points, stone hatchets, stone pipes, and half-shapen images. Of labor on the large scale, I think there is no remain as respectable as would be a common ditch for the draining of lands, unless indeed it be the Barrows, of which many are to be found all over this country.” Jefferson admits, “That they [the barrows] were repositories of the dead has been obvious to all,” but offers various speculations regarding the “occasion” of their construction.⁵⁹ He then describes his own excavation of a barrow in his “neighborhood”:

“I first dug superficially in several parts of it, and came to collections of human bones, at different depths, from six inches to three feet below the surface. These were lying in the utmost confusion, some vertical, some oblique, some horizontal, and directed to every point of the compass, entangled, and held together in clusters by the earth. Bones of the most distant parts were found together...so as, on the whole, to give the idea of bones emptied promiscuously from a bag or basket, and covered over with earth, without any attention to their order.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Jefferson, 125, 126.

⁵⁹ Jefferson, 147.

⁶⁰ Jefferson, 148.

Here, Jefferson's "scientific" tone of quantitative measurement slips into confused, gothic chaos - chaos that he works to tame through orderly study. "I proceeded then to make a perpendicular cut through the body of the barrow, that I might examine its internal structure," he continues, explicitly conjuring an anatomical dissection. Examining the various "strata" of bodies that he discovers and, from their "different states of decay" inferring a "difference in the time of inhumation," Jefferson charts a deep human history within a single place, a history that continues into the present as he notes that parties of Indians still frequently make pilgrimages to such barrows.⁶¹ Yet, only a paragraph later he notes, "It is to be lamented...very much to be lamented, that we have suffered so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish, without our having previously collected and deposited in the records of literature the general rudiments at least of the languages they spoke."⁶² That Indian tribes should be "extinguished" is not in itself lamentable here, but that opportunities to document, systematize, and "deposit" (a word that evokes more layers, more strata) knowledge should be lost is "truly lamentable." The living Indians who visit the barrows, and some knowledge of their ways and languages, will, it seems, soon follow their ancestors in becoming "strata" of bones, of records. Here Jefferson reads in the land a vertical, linear story of the "decay" of American's indigenous peoples that stands in contrast to the conjectures of *The Hidden Hand*'s pit, but this vision remains unsettled, the strata of bones threatened by chaos, the "decay" challenged by living Indians visiting the mound.

As a history of the youthful America (*Notes* is, of course, not merely about Virginia, but stretches across the landscape in its discussion of rivers and mountains, and uses Virginia to talk about a larger whole) *Notes on the State of Virginia* also seeks to give a sense of a deeper past through its series of numbered queries that circle back on each other and repeat as they construct

⁶¹ Jefferson, 149-150.

⁶² Jefferson, 151.

a story of evolution and progress for America. Of course, the desire to give the American landscape a human history even while denying the humanness of the history through pseudo-scientific documentation - and while denying a future to the peoples whose history is being examined - did not end with Jefferson. Interest in Indian “antiquities” and burial mounds only increased in the early nineteenth century as Americans became ever more invested in asserting a deep American past, and in “knowing” the history of spaces being incorporated into the growing nation in ways that would naturalize that growth. *The Hidden Hand*’s stories of layered bodies within the pit below Capitola’s bedroom conjure one type of settler violence. The excavation of Indian barrows as the nation expanded westward represents another. Attempts to open the strata of the past to vision legitimized and simultaneously challenged settler ventures, including claims of linear progress through historical time. This chapter will eventually return to this tension through a discussion of the Egan-Dickenson panorama, *Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*.

“The dead never come back”: Fictions of (Dis)possession

Situated in a landscape at once romanticized with its dramatic ravines and caves and connected to very real histories of dispossession and violence, *The Hidden Hand* conjoins geographies and stories about the pasts of those spaces through its fragmented, repetitive serial structure, as it simultaneously overlaps characters across time. And though Capitola stands to inherit the spoils of settler violence, she is also, as previously suggested, directly aligned with the dispossessed Indians through her own dispossession. As Carpenter notes, “Cap’s red birthmark, the miniature hand, implies, among other things, her kinship with the Indians: a Le Noir has also

attempted to murder her to obtain her property.”⁶³ At the same time, Capitola is unambiguously associated with African-Americans and with blackness through her name, her “brand” (the hidden hand on her hand), and through the fact that she was sold into slavery as an infant, along with her mulatta nurse. These associations coalesce in ideas about property and death that circulate through the novel. “The dead never come back; or, if they do, are not recognized as property-holders in this world!” Black Donald reflects when telling Le Noir that he wishes Capitola had been killed when she was an infant rather than being sold away alive, enabling her to eventually return to claim her rightful inheritance.⁶⁴ The notion that the dead might return runs throughout the novel as characters like Granny Grewell, Craven, Black Donald, Traverse, and Capitola’s mother seem to literally return from the dead, and as past actions are repeated in the present. That the “returned” dead cannot hold property suggests the dispossession of the dead Indians, the deaths of Capitola’s father and twin brother, both of whom should have held the property that she now stands to inherit, the “social” and legal death imposed on slaves, and the different type of social and legal death imposed on women within the novel.⁶⁵ The possibility of a return (Capitola’s) that threatens the new status quo established by the novel’s villains is given material form in the image of the pit that metaphorically connects past and present, and is reinforced in the novel’s serial structure of repetition.

The theme of female dispossession of property that runs through *The Hidden Hand* is bound up in broader problematics of the dispossession of truths and the construction of alternative truths for the women in the book, themes that reinforce the novel’s engagement with questions about who speaks for whom and what can be known from multiple, disparate stories of

⁶³ Carpenter, 26.

⁶⁴ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 148.

⁶⁵ The notion of twinning and the dead twin also aligns Capitola with the Indians since twins play a significant role in native traditions.

the past. Much of the novel concerns the way that fictions are created for and imposed upon female characters. From Marah Rocke's assertion of her innocence in her alleged affair with Le Noir, to Clara's conviction of her right to stay in her own house until she comes of age and of her right to marry Traverse, to Capitola's mother's insistence on her sanity while being held in a New Orleans asylum, women's stories are not believed. As Carpenter notes, Old Hurricane invents a fiction for Capitola by calling her Miss Black and taking her into his home as if it were "her country seat...just as Cap's real uncle, Le Noir, has invented [a fiction] for her mother."⁶⁶ And as Veronica Stewart points out, "conventional narrative forms and the discourse of the law work together to trap women within romance chronotypes," chronotypes that Capitola refuses in her anti-sentimental brashness. The novel is characterized by a "self-reflexive concern about the potential for women characters to narrate the stories of their own lives with authority."⁶⁷

Threats to women's property (that also become about property and race through Capitola's ambiguously raced status) are bound up in a denial of voice associated both with the formal conventions of the law, and also with more general social and narrative conventions that figure women (and slaves and Indians) as "living dead," unable to hold property, able to be locked away in domestic spaces that become prisons, as Capitola's mother, Clara, and even Capitola are. The pit that links the domestic and the external is at the heart of critiques of female (dis)empowerment through its association with a threat to Capitola's person and through the way she uses the pit to escape becoming a victim herself. At once a gothic convention associated with endangering the female body (through rape and dishonor), and a narrative "out" that gives Capitola the upper hand, the pit and its hidden stories intersect with the novel's focus on the silencing of women – the ways in which their own truths become hidden, become fictions. As

⁶⁶ Carpenter, 22.

⁶⁷ Stewart, 157; 158.

Capitola's mother explains to Traverse when he believes the story of her captivity and works to free her from the asylum near New Orleans where she is held, "I told him [Doctor St. Jean] the truth about myself as calmly as I now speak to you; but somebody else had told him that this truth was the fiction of a deranged imagination, and he found it more convenient and profitable to believe somebody else!"⁶⁸

Convenience and profit, then, lie beneath the stories that men choose to believe about women, and about Indians and slaves. Indeed, the way that "truths" are crafted and tailored, and the destructive misunderstandings that result, is a theme that runs throughout the novel. It is a theme that again links the domestic sphere to larger questions about history, about property, and about land. When Old Hurricane is explaining Capitola's secret status as the dispossessed heiress of the Le Noir estate to the neighborhood minister he tells the man that certain "facts and *falsehoods* were the common property of the neighborhood," but that the minister did not know particular critical details. In yoking commonly held facts and falsehoods to the notion of property, Old Hurricane ties variability of truths and storytelling to questions about possession – questions that, like so many aspects of the novel, are condensed in the dynamic image of the pit, about which various stories are told, and which is linked to ideas of taking "property" in the form of land and bodies.

"Invading Another's Country," Again

The conjuncture of history, land, and bodies associated with the pit stretches across the continent and across the novel to the episode where the narrative most explicitly touches the (near) present, linking various forms of historical dispossession to the novel's clearest critique of imperial ventures. Immediately following the chapters in which Black Donald falls into the trap,

⁶⁸ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 446.

the narrative moves to the moment when “The United States army, under General Scott, invested the city of Mexico.”⁶⁹ The reader had been introduced to a critique of this campaign chapters earlier when Herbert and Traverse unexpectedly meet in New Orleans and discover that they are both going to fight in the U.S.-Mexico war. Upon being told that he would have received favorable news from home that would have prevented his enlistment had he waited a few days longer, Traverse laments his decision to become a soldier. When Herbert reminds him that it is “honorable at least to serve your country” Traverse proclaims, “If a foreign foe invaded her shores, yes; but what had I to do with invading another’s country? – enlisting for a war of the rights and wrongs of which I know no more than anybody else does!”⁷⁰

This notion of “invading another’s country,” of taking possession, is connected to attempted possession of female bodies in the chapters that separate this first mention of Mexico from the later action in Mexico. In those intervening chapters Capitola first defends her honor by challenging Le Noir’s son Craven to a duel after he insults her, and then by dropping Black Donald into the pit beneath her bedroom. When Craven first professes his admiration for Capitola, and before he becomes offended that she rejects him, she politely thanks him for his “preference,” but tells him “I belong to somebody else” and then repeats “I belong to another!”⁷¹ Growing increasingly exasperated when he persists, she questions, “Will nobody serve your purpose, but somebody else’s sweetheart? – I have told you that I belong to a brave young soldier who is fighting his country’s battles in a foreign land.”⁷² Here, “belonging” of hearts, bodies, and territories are overlaid in one sentence as a critique of the war continues. But it is

⁶⁹ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 400.

⁷⁰ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 345.

⁷¹ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 357.

⁷² Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 358.

Capitola's choice to "belong" to Herbert.⁷³ Why Herbert is fighting "his country's battles in a foreign land," a land that does not "belong" to his country, is a question that seems to linger.

When the narrative returns Mexico and the war following Capitola's "conquering" of Black Donald, it returns to a particular historical time and place: "that period of suspense and of false truce, between the glorious 20th of August, and the equally glorious 8th of September, 1847 – between the two most brilliant actions of the war, the battle of Churubusco and the storming of Chapultepec."⁷⁴ As María DeGuzmán points out in her discussion of Emanuel Leutze's 1848 painting *The Storming of the Teocalli Temple by Cortez and His Troops* (see Figure 4.1), the storming of Chapultepec became "the iconic symbol of the eventual occupation of Mexico City...by U.S. troops. This garrison on a hill was of no great military importance but had profound historical resonance for both the United States and Mexico. The hill had once been the site of an Aztec palace destroyed in the Spanish Conquest. In its place the Spanish viceroys had built a summer palace that, with Mexican independence, had been taken over by the Republic of Mexico as the site of the Mexican Military College."⁷⁵ DeGuzmán shows that Leutze's painting "condenses time and place, the 'storming of the Teocalli Temple' by Hernán Cortés and his men and the 'storming of the Castle of Chapultepec' by the United States" in order to "displace U.S. territorial ambitions and violent expansionist tactics...onto colonial encounter between Spaniards

⁷³ Capitola's assertion that she "belongs" to Herbert - that he, in a sense, "possesses" her - and her marriage to him at the novel's end is a heteronormative, domestic convention that seems to contradict her brash independence and the novel's critique of male control over women. This has bothered some, but as in so many things, the novel has it both ways.

⁷⁴ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 401.

⁷⁵ María DeGuzmán, *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 88-89.

and Aztecs.”⁷⁶ (Leutze is, incidentally, best known for another iconic, fictionalized historical painting – his *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851).)

Figure 4.1: Emanuel Leutze, *The Storming of the Teocalli Temple by Cortez and His Troops* (1848) (This image does not appear due to copyright restrictions.)

In focusing on this iconic moment, collapsing the Spanish conquest of Aztecs with the United States conquest of Mexico as so many authors and artists did at the time, Southworth, like Leutze, invokes a sense of conjoined pasts suggested in the image of the pit beneath Capitola’s bedroom. “The General-in-chief of the United States forces in Mexico was at his headquarters in the archiepiscopal palace of Tacubaya, on the suburbs, or in the full sight of the city of the Montezumas,” Southworth states, placing American invaders atop Spanish atop Aztec, a sense of spatial and temporal layering that continues in the description of the setting for Traverse’s court martial: “Within a lofty apartment of the building, which was probably at one time the great dining-hall of the priests, were collected some twenty persons, comprising the court-martial and

⁷⁶ DeGuzmán, 89; 90. See also Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jesse Alemán, “The Other Country: Mexico, the United States, and the Gothic History of Conquest” in *Hemispheric American Studies*, and the “Introduction” to Shelley Streeby and Jesse Alemán, *Empire and the Literature of Sensation* for discussion of popular gothic and sensation fiction, burial and layering, historical amnesia, and imperialism in relation to 1848 and the war with Mexico.

its attendants.”⁷⁷ Re-purposing a formerly sacred space for a military tribunal, these men can be seen to re-write the history of a specific place much as they seek to re-write the story of a larger territory. Given Southworth’s explicit critique of the war in *The Hidden Hand*, written eleven years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, this layering seems not so much a displacement of U.S. territorial ambitions onto a Spanish “other” as an alignment of two imperial powers across the centuries. Time separates two different “stormings” of this space, yet that temporal distance is collapsed in the narrative space of the novel, allowing Southworth to again yolk past and present violence.

The purpose of the court martial held in “the great dining-hall of the priests” – to try Traverse for falling asleep at his post, a state temporarily aligning him with the dead in life status of other dispossessed characters in the novel – concerns the crafting of a (hi)story in a very real way. In sending Traverse on various consecutive missions, ensuring that he would not be able to sleep for days, Colonel Le Noir determines the outcome of this particular part of Traverse’s story. Le Noir then puts his faith in the narrative that the law has constructed for dealing with such cases. Falling asleep at one’s post is punishable by death. In arguing Traverse’s case before the court martial, Herbert convinces the officers of the court to reconsider the relationship between past and present – to realize that, as the President of the court proclaims, “this thing is without *precedent*! In all the annals of courts martial, without *precedent*!” and that, consequently, the past cannot furnish a model for the present in this instance.⁷⁸ The need to reconsider the “iron car of literal law” so that Traverse is not killed for an action that was pre-scripted for him continues a theme of critiquing legal “illogic” apparent in other parts of the novel, including the Orphan Court’s refusal to abide by Dr. Day’s last wishes regarding Clara’s

⁷⁷ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 413.

⁷⁸ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 423.

future. But it also extends a theme about reconsidering the past more generally – about allowing for different stories and different outcomes.

To consider the situation from Traverse's point of view, as Herbert encourages the men of the court to do, is to look beyond the authoritative master narrative to other possibilities – to other narratives. This message is made clear not only by Herbert's demand that the court establish a new "precedent" in dealing with Traverse's situation, but also through more explicit calls for alternative histories within the portion of *The Hidden Hand* devoted to the Mexican War. "A succession of splendid victories had marked every stage of their advance, from the sea-coast to the capital," begins the narrative's turn to Mexico. "The names of Scott, Worth, Wool, Quitman, Pillow, and others, were crowned with honor. Others, again, whose humble names and unnoticed heroism has never been recorded, endured as nobly, suffered as patiently, and fought as bravely."⁷⁹

In moving the reader into Traverse's tribulations in Mexico then, the novel makes a more general claim for attention to the "humble names and unnoticed heroism" of the past. This is followed, two pages later, by the narrator's assertion that "It is not my intention to pretend to describe the siege and capture of the capital, which has been so often and eloquently described by grave and wise historians, but rather to follow the fortunes of a humble private in the ranks and relate the events of a certain court martial, as I learned them from the after-dinner talk of a gallant officer, who had officiated on the occasion."⁸⁰ While this narrative aside helps the narrator to move between the historical details of General Scott and the American army and one of her fictional heroes, it also reasserts a commitment to "hidden" histories rather than well-known and celebrated narratives of heroics. The suggestion that these details were gleaned

⁷⁹ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 400.

⁸⁰ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 402.

through causal conversation with someone involved in the events rather than from a distanced, authoritative printed account, continues the sense of actively giving voice to the silenced.

Ultimately, however, the histories of men and war are left behind in favor of attending to the silenced, hidden histories of women, as the chapters following the Mexican War episode have Traverse finding Capitola's mother in an asylum, her "truths" denied by men who believe the stories told by other men. This turn had been anticipated earlier when, after introducing the fact that Herbert and Traverse will be going to war, the novel returns to Capitola, announcing that "We might just as easily as not accompany our troops to Mexico and relate the feats of arms there performed... We might follow the rising star of our young lieutenant... but we need not, because the feats of Lieutenant – Captain - Major and Colonel Greyson, are they not written in the chronicles of the Mexican War? *We* prefer to look after our little domestic heroine, our brave little Cap, who, when women have their rights, shall be a lieutenant-colonel herself."⁸¹ In first returning from Mexico to Capitola, and then from Mexico to her mother, the novel urges attention to other alternative pasts, and imagines an alternative future – one "when women have their rights."

Bookended by scenes of female captivity, possession, and denied truths, the Mexico section brings nearly contemporary issues of territory – issues of territory that affected slavery and the burgeoning sectional conflict that might seem to be ignored in *The Hidden Hand* – into contact with dead in life bodies of soldiers and women. Black Donald's fall into the pit of Indian bones brings us west to Mexico and to other histories of dispossession. The sensational rhetoric of attempted rape in the confined space of the bedroom and of the wronged woman held captive for eighteen years both look out onto fields of battle that tell other stories of denied pasts.

⁸¹ Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 348.

“From Vera Cruz to Philadelphia”: Panoramic Pasts

George Lippard, whose fate Peterson warned Southworth of in one of his letters to her, harnessed the domestic space of a female bedroom to look out upon a vista of layered histories of territorial expansion in his own sensational novel *'Bel of Prairie Eden*, first published serially in the Boston weekly *Uncle Sam* in 1848, just as the war with Mexico was drawing to a close. In that novel, violation of female bodies and honor is explicitly linked to struggles over land. Yet the novel's politics remain hazy as the Mexican villain, Don Antonio Marin, is given a foil in the form of the American “hero” John Grywin, who is himself hurt by his victory over Don Antonio. Structured by repetitious revenge, *'Bel* too conjoins histories so that not only the characters' actions are shown to repeat themselves, but so too are histories of imperial conquest.

Briefly, *'Bel* tells the story of the Grywin family, once wealthy Philadelphians who have moved into the newly formed Republic of Texas. Years earlier the eponymous Isabel had refused Don Antonio's suit when he was the “attaché of the Mexican legation, at Washington.”⁸² Don Antonio seeks revenge for this slight at the same time that Mexico seeks to reclaim Texas in 1842. Invading the Grywin family's idyllic Texas homestead, Prairie Eden, Don Antonio drugs and rapes 'Bel (or coerces her into exchanging her body for her father's life), hangs her father (anyway), and later kills her younger brother. 'Bel's older brother John spends five years seeking revenge for these atrocities, eventually killing Don Antonio's father and wooing his sister Isora, whose honor he plans to ruin as Don Antonio had ruined 'Bel's. At the same time, John tells Isora of the wrongs done to his family, withholding the identity of his enemy so that she, unwittingly, comes to despise her own brother.

⁸² George Lippard, *'Bel of Prairie Eden, A Romance of Mexico* (1848) reprinted in *Empire and the Literature of Sensation: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction*, Jesse Alemán and Shelley Streeby, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 127.

The sensational repetitions of violation and murder are explicit, muddling the novel's stance on the territorial ambitions of these warring families – one representing Texas and the other Mexico – since while Don Antonio is clearly evil, John replicates his wrongs. To complicate matters, the Grywin patriarch, a former bank director, had moved his family to Texas from the east in 1840 following the collapse of his bank. He “turned traitor to the trust of some thousand widows and orphans, and then fled.”⁸³ This family too has preyed on or abandoned the helpless. Furthermore, the Grywins have brought slaves west with them, enacting one of Lippard's fears for the new territory. While the reader's allegiance is often with the Grywin family, that allegiance is not, then, always a comfortable one. Lippard himself supported expansion into western lands as a way to provide opportunities for the white working class and it is perhaps in this fact that an answer to the novel's commitments lies. Annexation and westward migration can be positive, but the wealthy who make the poor suffer or who spread slavery will suffer themselves. More generally, *'Bel of Prairie Eden* takes a more ambivalent stance toward the war than many of Lippard's other writings. In *'Bel*, as Shelley Streeby puts it, Lippard's “utopia for redeemed labor becomes a haunted homestead in the Texas borderlands.”⁸⁴

The moment when Don Antonio and John Grywin meet face-to-face years after the violence at Prairie Eden is a moment that collapses violation of female bodies and spaces with imperial ambitions in a panoramic palimpsest of history. Don Antonio, now a monk, and Don Augustin, who is betrothed to Isora, have traced an American “spy” to her “bed chamber” in the family mansion. They demand entry. (Significantly, Isora has been barring the door to the room with her arm, a detail that Lippard includes in other novels like *Blanche of Brandywine*, making the female body itself integral to the policing of spaces and the violation of female bodies

⁸³ Lippard, 125.

⁸⁴ Streeby, *American Sensations*, 73.

representative of other violations.) Isora eventually allows her brother to search her chamber. He cannot find the intruder, but notices that a statue of the Virgin has been displaced from its recess, and that there is, of course, a “secret stairway, leading from the bed-chamber to the roof.”⁸⁵ (’Bel too had a statue of the Virgin in her chamber at Prairie Eden, an explicit symbol of the bodily and spiritual purity threatened by the men in the novel, but also of land, which is often described as feminine and pure.)⁸⁶ Launching himself through the hidden door and up ten steps rather than down into a concealed pit, Don Antonio finds himself immersed in layers of violence.

His emergence onto the flat roof of his own “paternal mansion” brings his enemy, John, into view. It also brings a two chapter panoramic vision of historical conjuncture that the reader had been prepared for by the novel’s very first sentence, spoken to John by his younger brother: “Come, brother, it is a beautiful view – look yonder” and by occasional mention of the “hazy line of the horizon” on the Texas prairie.⁸⁷ Looking “yonder” over the landscape will be inspiring, yet unclear, the novel tells us at the outset. As Don Antonio steps onto the roof, John grabs his arm, instructing him to “‘Remember...and look yonder!’,” yoking the past and seeing. “Quivering with a fear more terrible to behold because its source is unknown to us,” the narrative continues, “the monk beheld the sight which spread before him. It was a sight to swell the heart with a vague yet overwhelming sense of the sublime. Let us stand beside him on the roof of the mansion which overlooks the main square of the town, and gaze upon the vision which he beheld and feel its dusk sublimity rush thro’ the eyesight to our souls.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Lippard, 141.

⁸⁶ See Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) for a foundational reading of the feminization of the American landscape.

⁸⁷ Lippard, 111; 118.

⁸⁸ Lippard, 141. See Streeby, *American Sensations*, 67-73 for a discussion of visual culture and Lippard’s “panorama of war” in his *Legends of Mexico* (1847).

John, Don Antonio, and reader stand and survey Vera Cruz from above, “its roofs and towers, rising indistinctly in the gloom, with the Grand Plaza, right before us, encircled by noble structures, and the sandy shore, stretching as far as eye can see, to the north and south, in dreary barrenness.”⁸⁹ Describing the view in each direction at a pregnant moment when history is about to “happen” these chapters simultaneously tell the story of an earlier history, using the space of the city and the landscape beyond to convey a sense of historical repetition immediately evident in the epigraphs to these two chapters: “Winfield Scott in the footsteps of Cortes” and “In order to estimate the present we must look upon the past. ‘I will tell you,’ said the veteran, ‘a story of the days of old, in order that you may understand that which I have to state of, - the ninth of March, 1847.’”⁹⁰

As the men stand on the roof “the hardy children of the North” arrive, “the soldiers of the new crusade throng the waters and the shore, at least twelve thousand strong.”⁹¹ Describing Scott’s 1847 conquest as a glorious vision of American triumph, the novel’s commitments seem momentarily clear. These American men are “noble.” Scott, “standing erect in the foremost barge, with the light playing upon [his] muscular chest” is clearly heroic.⁹² Worth springs from the “foremost barge” to plant the banner in the sand and stands “alone upon the beach, the waves curling at his feet, the Banner of the Continent waving over his head.”⁹³ These magnificent moments occur in a landscape full of past conquests, however, a fact made clear in the second paragraph of this two chapter “panorama” when our gaze is brought “Toward the east” where

⁸⁹ Lippard, 142.

⁹⁰ Lippard, 142, 149. The epigraphs within the text come from a fictional “Texan Mss.”.

⁹¹ Lippard, 144.

⁹² Lippard, 145.

⁹³ Lippard, 146.

“waves break in low murmurs against the barren Isle of Sacrificios, barren to the sight, yet bearing in its bosom mysterious chambers, stored with relics of six hundred years ago.”⁹⁴

Those relics are, of course, those of the Aztecs, themselves conquered “Three hundred years ago [when] the same lone Orizaba, that towers serenely now, flashing its calm scorn upon the petty broils of man...that same Orizaba beheld a far different scene.”⁹⁵ Imagining the same landscape during the height of the Aztec empire, the panoramic history depicts the Aztecs as “a wonderous people” dwelling “amid gorgeous cities, or in the silence of the beautiful valleys, their dusky faces, glowing with the same passions that fill our bosoms now.”⁹⁶ But it also depicts “horrible alters...dripping with the warm blood of the human sacrifice” and Montezuma as being “of a despotic government and a barbarous religion,” emphasizing difference as swiftly as it had imagined connections over time.⁹⁷

What follows is a scene in which Cortes convinces his men to help him to conquer the same land being conquered in the narrative’s present. Cortes’ conquering is depicted as less vigorous and more fraught than Scott’s, giving a sense of primacy and righteousness to the American cause, yet the two events are nevertheless collapsed as the view from the roof encapsulates a spatial and temporal simultaneity: “a sight to swell the heart with a vague yet overwhelming sense of the sublime.” The heightened drama and glory given to the 1847 conquest is undermined by the view down into a repetitive history of subjugation – and it is literally undermined by the “mysterious chambers” beneath that landscape, “stored with relics of six hundred years ago.” The past is not erased here, but is an active force beneath the present, helping to “estimate” the present.

⁹⁴ Lippard, 142.

⁹⁵ Lippard, 147.

⁹⁶ Lippard, 147.

⁹⁷ Lippard, 147; 148.

The vista of layered space and time accessed through the secret door in Isora's bed chamber is only the most extended conflation of conquests in the novel, a conflation reinforced in an earlier chapter epigraph ("It was on the ninth of March, 1847, that Winfield Scott, landed with 12,000 Americans, on the very coast where Cortes, with 300 Spaniards had landed three centuries ago"), as well as in the subterranean chambers beneath the Isle of Sacrificios.⁹⁸ In those chambers, "where the priests of the forgotten creed administered their bloody rites 300 years ago, now sits the escaped slave of the American Navy making merry."⁹⁹ In those gothic rooms of rock, John achieves his ultimate revenge, taking Isora without marriage and getting Don Antonio's former henchman, Ewen McGregor, the "escaped slave of the American Navy" (who happens to have been Jacob Grywin's clerk in Philadelphia and so is a traitor to the Grywin family) to stab Don Antonio as part of an improvised initiation ceremony into a fabricated rebel group. Isora sees Don Antonio die without knowing that it is her brother, and Don Antonio hears his sister as he dies, but cannot see her. Earlier, however, he has seen her without being able to reach her as 'Bel, party to the structures of revenge, brings him to an aperture in a solid wall of rock (an aperture that echoes the secret doorway in Isora's bed chamber) through which he is forced to watch his sister and her "lover-husband," John.¹⁰⁰ Made to witness the "conquest" of his sister, Don Antonio frantically appeals to 'Bel for "Pity—mercy—not for my sake, but for hers!" 'Bel replies to these entreaties only with place names – "*Prairie Eden!*" and "*Rancho Salado!*" – reminding Don Antonio of spaces associated with his own crimes against her family.¹⁰¹ With this move, the violation of Isora's purity becomes linked to particular

⁹⁸ Lippard, 136.

⁹⁹ Lippard, 167.

¹⁰⁰ Lippard, 173. See Shirley Samuels, *Facing America: Iconography and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) for a brief analysis of "looking and witnessing" as a "form of violence" in *'Bel of Prairie Eden* (35).

¹⁰¹ Lippard, 174.

geographies as metonyms for the deeds committed there, and the narratives of revenge for bodily desecration are overlaid on the landscape.

This conjuncture of body and land is not only associated with Aztecs, Mexicans, and the novel's abused women but also, earlier in the novel, with North American Indians as the second chapter begins with a "lone Indian" standing on the summit of a mound, glaring "with an immovable gaze over the glorious view." Here the prairies with "their boundless view, their vast horizon," their mounds topped with aged trees "massive as blocks of granite, and encrusted with the thick bark, that had been hardening for centuries" are also sites of layers of history emphasized in the "rugged rind of the ancient oaken trees."¹⁰² "Before this knoll itself was reared, as the grave of warriors, Red men were upon this soil, the Kings, the Prophets of their people," the Indian speaks aloud in his "rude...tongue." "Where are they now?" he continues. "The bones of the mighty men rest in the bosom of this knoll – but their children, where are they? Look for them far away by the great Salt Lake, in the land of the setting sun!"¹⁰³ In a standard evocation of Manifest Destiny, "White civilization" comes from the east with "banners and bayonets," and the Indians move west in advance of them, leaving "that prairie of the wilderness...to solitude and God."¹⁰⁴ Yet the mound of Indian bones on which the mansion of Prairie Eden will be erected in the grove of ancient trees – the house in which 'Bel will be "ruined," the trees on which her father will be hanged – challenges that linear, westward trajectory through a reminder of what lies beneath.

¹⁰² Lippard, 118.

¹⁰³ Lippard, 119.

¹⁰⁴ Lippard, 119.

As much as *'Bel of Prairie Eden* may seem to suggest victory for the Euro-American project represented by John Grywin, that victory is not unproblematic. Although he achieves his revenge, along the way, John loses his entire family. ('Bel, we later discover, has withered away and died, a standard requirement of her status as a ruined woman). He also loses Isora, whom he has come to love, but who dies at the novel's end. Where Southworth has Capitola subvert such narrative stereotypes, violently defending her virtue and always gaining the upper hand (though Capitola does marry at the end of *The Hidden Hand*, a conclusion that has seemed unnecessarily conventional to some), Lippard's women must die. We are left feeling something like sympathy for John, whose project of revenge has left him with nothing. Ultimately, however, Lippard's sympathies seem to lie with the working class masses who suddenly appear at the end of the novel when, after witnessing the dramatic spectacle of revenge acted out in the subterranean chambers beneath the Isle of Sacrificios, the narrative jumps "From Vera Cruz to Philadelphia," the first sentence of the chapter with that title being "It was in the Walnut-Street Theatre."¹⁰⁵

Here it is the pit of the theatre and the strata of class that provide sites for Lippard's standard critiques of the plight of the poor and of critics' responses to his sensational fictions. Anticipating complaints about the narrative's sudden move to the east ("I hear the snarl of the critic, and thus he barks, - 'Here's a pretty transition – from the Aztec vault of Vera Cruz to a Philadelphia theater! Horrible! Here we have a story commencing on the prairies of Texas, suddenly dashing away to a desolate rancho in the heart of Mexico, then to Vera Cruz and the vaults of Sacrificios, and last of all to a Philadelphia theater!'"), and perhaps responding to critiques of the parts of the novel that had already appeared, Lippard draws attention to the

¹⁰⁵ Lippard, 183.

novel's geographic mobility before highlighting its narrative mobility by urging his readers to "Call this digression a preface to my story, if you please, and I will explain."¹⁰⁶

He then lambastes critics who will attack the licentiousness of his tale while engaging in immoral activities themselves, and calls attention to the trials of the working poor: "Look over this thronged house [the theater], swarming from the ceiling to the cellar, with life – life in every shape – tapestried in its three tiers of boxes with human faces, a sea of ragged humanity boiling over in the pit."¹⁰⁷ Using the tiers of the theater, from the "elegantly dressed men" and "beautiful women" in the "first circle" to the "hardy sons of toil" in the "overflowing pit," to depict the inequalities that his writings so often emphasize, Lippard criticizes an economy that has "a half-naked woman showing her limbs for bread to feed a sick mother or dying sister...while gray-haired men look on and gloat."¹⁰⁸ Of course, these are the same critiques of licentious mass appeal that his own writings were subjected to and that he attempts to respond to in his critiques of the critics. As Southworth's pit represents a popular "center" of sensational devices and narrative expectations fulfilled and simultaneously subverted, Lippard seeks to harness the popular to tell alternative stories, while drawing attention to the populace associated with the pit of the theater.

'Bel of Prairie Eden folds over on itself here as an ending "digression" is said to provide a beginning, as dramas that began in the east with 'Bel's refusal of Don Antonio and a bank collapse move west, and then return to the east. The novel moves geographically and narratively, yet circles back and hovers in layers of repetitious revenge and imperial aggression. Plunging through the secret door in Isora's room brings a panoramic view of historical conjuncture, as the dark pit beneath Capitola's bedroom potentially holds within it multiple

¹⁰⁶ Lippard, 183; 184.

¹⁰⁷ Lippard, 185.

¹⁰⁸ Lippard, 186.

horrific histories, from frontier violence against Indians to slavery to threats to Capitola herself. Harnessing popular forms associated with the “pit” of the theater and the populace, these serialized fictions disrupt a progressive, linear interpretation of history through their repetitive histories of violence and fragmented structures of repetition and return, structures that belie their “linear,” consecutive format. At the same time, they challenge truth claims as they highlight the fictions constructed for and about others.

Moving Past(s)

While Capitola looks into the pit beneath her room and sees only “darkness ‘visible’,” while John, Don Antonio, and reader look out upon a layered past of imperial ventures, many Americans in the 1840s and 1850s began to view the space of the continent and its past through another popular form that simultaneously suggests linear movement and, in some cases, repetitive, fragmented discontinuities – the form of the moving panorama. Like sensational, serialized fictions such as *The Hidden Hand* and *'Bel of Prairie Eden* which tell stories of multiple histories of violence in forms that themselves repeat and circle back narratively, that are themselves punctured by temporal gaps and suspended at intervals, some moving panoramas can be seen to complicate geographical and historical knowledge of spaces claimed through superficially linear forms.

This is evidenced in the only surviving moving panorama of the Mississippi River from the mid-nineteenth century, John J. Egan and Dr. Montroville William Dickeson’s *Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*. Dickeson had spent the years from 1837-1844 traveling through the Mississippi Valley and had, according to the undoubtedly exaggerated broadside printed to advertise his traveling lecture, “opened over 1,000 Indian Monuments or Mounds, and

has now a collection of 40,000 *relics* of those interesting but unhistoried Native Americans.”¹⁰⁹

Dickeson commissioned the panorama, consisting of forty-five scenes (supposedly based on drawings he had done himself during his travels, though in many cases that would have been impossible) to illustrate his lecture. Egan used tempera paint on lightweight muslin so that the entire panorama weighed only one hundred pounds, making it relatively easy to transport.

Such moving panoramas were, especially in America, more practical and popular than stationary, round panoramas, which required special, more permanent structures. As Stephan Oettermann points out, moving panoramas could be set up in any large hall, “and performances also took place on riverboats or even out of doors, if there was no church hall available.”¹¹⁰ Moving from town to town as popular traveling spectacles, the panoramas themselves moved, “anticipat[ing], in art, the speed of travel which the railroads would soon make a reality...[viewers] saw the vast landscape of their continent unrolling before their eyes, as if they were traveling westward in a covered wagon...not a few of the panoramas were calculated to appeal to new immigrants, to awaken a desire in them to stake their own claim and settle down.”¹¹¹ Among the most popular subjects for these moving panoramas were America’s rivers – the Hudson, St. Lawrence, Missouri, Ohio, and especially the Mississippi, a river that seemed to require the epic qualities and immense panorama lengths (“12,000 feet!,” “15,000 feet!”

¹⁰⁹ The broadside says that “Dr. D. has devoted twelve years of his life in these investigations,” but historical sources give the period of his travel as indicated above.

¹¹⁰ Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, Deborah Lucas Schneider trans. (Zone Books: New York, 1997), 323. Oettermann also suggests that Americans were less interested in round panorama paintings because the content of such paintings often focused on Europe and the East rather than the American West and because “Americans...were dealing with dimensions in their own country that could not be grasped or conquered simply by climbing to an elevated point and surveying the horizon. The circular painting was visually inadequate to the situation in which they found themselves” (323).

¹¹¹ Oettermann, 323.

“three miles!”) claimed by broadsides advertising such spectacles. As the land would move past as one stood on the deck of a riverboat, so would it move past as one stood on dry land.

The Egan-Dickeson panorama notably merges the movement of westward expansion with excavation of a past buried within the landscape. Many of the twenty-five panels still in existence depict Indian ruins of one type or another, but none is as dramatic, and none captures as clear a sense of “vertical time,” as the panel depicting the excavation of a barrow (Figure 4.2). The mound is depicted in cross-section, its “strata” evoking Jefferson’s description of his own excavation, which placed Indians firmly in the past, its depiction as a “knoll” of bones echoing the lament of Lippard’s lone Indian. The layers of skeletons within the mound suggest an orderly, visual representation of time – a representation slightly complicated by the skeleton seated in a vertical pit at the top of the mound (Figure 4.3). The orderly positioning of the intact skeletons stands in contrast to the scattered bones shown at the base of the mound and the jumble of bones wedged into a large clay pot. The shift in visual perspective in the depiction of the mound’s base, which is viewed as if from above rather than from the side, adds to the scene’s sense of uncomfortable disruption. This imposition of multiple perspectives in one view visualizes challenges to representation and, by extension, to understanding the scene. Resisting easy depiction, requiring multiple vantage points, the barrow pushes back against illustrator and viewer.



Figure 4.2: John J. Egan, *Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*, ca. 1850
(Saint Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Trust)

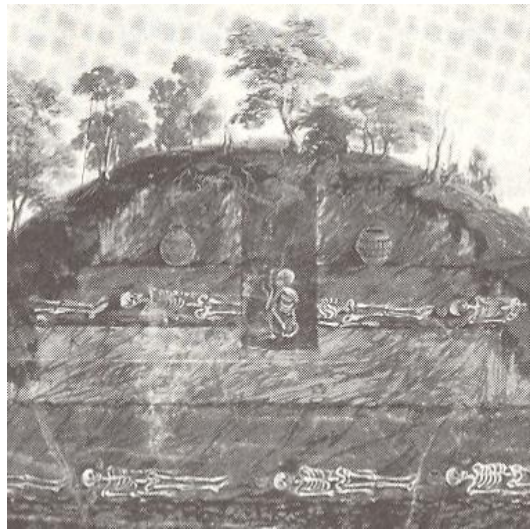


Figure 4.3: Detail, Egan, *Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*

That double perspective is echoed in a doubleness, or rather a multiplicity, of time suggested by the living Indians in the lower right hand corner where two teepees, a stereotypical depiction of Indianness, echo the shape of the mound in miniature (Figure 4.4). The arches of

the dark tent openings in particular echo the cross-section interior of the barrow, linking the spaces of the living and the departed, or suggesting that the living will soon be departed. Yet one of the Indian women holds an infant in her arms, an image of life and of futurity that stands in distinct contrast to the skeletons – the only other figures in the scene lying down.

The cluster of living Indians in front of the teepees is itself echoed by the cluster of well-dressed white onlookers in the distance. Partly obscured by the dirt of the mound, these tourists are barely part of the scene, yet one of those figures manages to provide a focal point. Only two of the women face the mound and the viewer, but one of those women stands directly forward, ostensibly listening to the woman in white on her left (whose draped shawl inverts the arch of the mound and teepees, echoing the visual “V” in which the tourists are situated). Viewed from the front, this woman seems to reflect the viewer’s gaze directly. In the advertisement for Dr. Dickeson’s lecture, the panorama is referred to as “a most magnificent SCENIC MIRROR.” As the only figure in the scene who is looking directly forward, that woman momentarily suggests a personal rather than a “scenic” mirror, forging a link with the viewer – a link that is white and feminine.



Figure 4.4: Detail, Egan, *Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*

The other figures in the group of tourists face the picturesque view in the distance, contemplating willows, water, mounds, and mountains. One man gestures toward the scene before them, drawing the viewer's gaze into the landscape beyond and suggesting an engagement with the natural scene rather than with the archeological excavation behind him. In contrast to the reaching black-suited arm of the presumably white male tourist, the black arms of the African-American men in the foreground engage in the labor of excavation. Each is depicted in motion, digging with shovels, swinging pick-axes. Only the man at the far right of the mound rests his hands on the handle of his tool in a moment of stillness. The racial division within the image is clear. Black men work to unearth Indian bones at the direction of white "scientists" like Dr. Dickeson, shown at the center of the mound's base. Wielding paper and pencil, Dickeson and his two colleagues record and diagram their findings seeking to make the human past of the landscape known.¹¹²

As a single image this painting condenses layers of perceived "unhistoried" history of American space with the present, black labor with Indian bones, white female spectatorship with black labor and Indian bones, and the "unhistoried" past with a pastoral future held open to the viewer by the arm of the suited man wedged between mound and teepee. As one scene in what was a forty-five panel moving diorama, the image becomes part of a broader condensing of geographical space and historical time. The Egan-Dickeson panorama was geographically and historically disparate, containing vignettes that varied in subject from De Soto's death to an 1844 tornado. An advertisement indicates that the panorama was divided into three sections, but that there is little apparent order to the arrangement of the scenes, so that a view of the "Encamping

¹¹² See Michael A. Chaney, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 117-118 for a reading of the racial division of labor in this scene. According to Chaney, "For Egan's viewers...the panorama furnishes optic proof of the vanishing Indian, the supremacy of Anglo intellect, and the perpetuity of black labor" (118).

Grounds of Lewis and Clark” would be followed a bit later by the scene of the “Tornado of 1844.” The “Extermination of the French in 1729” appears to have been positioned in the middle of the panorama and, nearly at the end, appeared “De Soto’s Burial at White Cliffs.” The linear sequential scroll of muslin presents a layered, fractured historical narrative emphasized by the discrete nature of each scene – scenes separated by the interval of a brief moment, but separated nevertheless.¹¹³ Individual scenes conflate temporal periods, as in the image of the mound excavation with its ancient bones, present day Indians, and pastoral future, but the panorama as a whole also layers histories in a non-chronological manner. While the panorama would have unrolled before its viewers in one long length of fabric, the experience of viewing it would have been fractured and episodic, the linearity of the form belying the repetition of the content and spaces depicted (See Figure 4.5). Since most American moving panoramas relied on the conceit of travel through a landscape, since most seem to have offered a largely linear sense of movement across space and time replicating American movement westward, and since most strove to depict contemporary events and new places, the Egan-Dickeson panorama presents a notably different vision.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ See Lisa Lyons, “Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley,” *Design Quarterly*, No. 101/102, *The River: Images of the Mississippi* (1976), 32 and Angela Miller, “‘The Soil of an Unknown America’: New World Lost Empires and the Debate over Cultural Origins,” *American Art*, Vol. 8, No. ¾ (Summer-Autumn, 1994), 18 for consideration of this “fractured historical narrative” (Miller, 18). Michael Chaney, following Bernard Comment in *The Painted Panorama* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), identifies a “progression” of “chronological, spatial, and cultural typologies” in this panorama, “moving from tranquil indigenous families, to conflicts with settlers, to the eventual demise of indigenous populations” (117). These readings identify the scene of the barrow excavation as the “panorama’s culminating scene,” though Lyons and Miller’s readings, and the order given in the promotional advertisement, suggest otherwise. The fact that scholars seem unable to agree on the order of the scenes speaks both to the transience of the popular moving panorama and to the very dynamic mutability that I am pointing to here.

¹¹⁴ Martha Sandweiss notes that “The pressure to be topical was so intense that” one panorama “first exhibited in 1849, was updated in 1850 to show the most recent events in gold-rush California...As early as mid-September 1849, a panorama depicting the voyage to California around Cape Horn was show in New York. The following year, “James Wilkins’ Moving Mirror of the Overland Trail” became the popular prototype for numerous panoramas showing the overland route to the goldfields” (“Undecisive

Each View and Scene is taken from DRAWINGS MADE ON THE SPOT, by

Prof. M. W. DICKESON, M. D.,

Who spent TWELVE YEARS of his life in exploring

Indian Mounds.

SECTION I.

Marietta Ancient Fortification—A grand view of their Walls, Bastions, Ramparts, Fosses and Walls, with the relief therein found—Circled Aboriginal Tumuli—Odo Chief in full costume—Yachia at their War Practices—Hanging at Hieroglyphical Rock—Colored Post at low water mark, used as a note by the Aborigines—Parramouth Aboriginal Group in a Storm—Cave in the Rock, Stagnant Chamber and Crystal Fountain, Decimated and Mummified Bodies in their burial places—Magnificent effect of Crystallization—Turned Mound in a snow storm, at sunset—Twelve great Labyrinth, Missouri—Indians at their pictorial capitals.

SECTION II.

Don Juan Island Group—Oblique view of the Rocky Mountains—Rampaging Grounds of Lewis and Clark—Louisiana Swale Group, with extensive Wall—Lakes and Sacrificial Monuments—Sketch III by Moonlight—Indian Encampment—Oblique view of Louisiana—Indians preparing supper—The Tornado of 1848—Destruction of Indian Settlements—North Sea of Life—Louisiana Squatter pursued by Wolves—Huge Stone—Prairie with Buffalo, Elk, and Gopherus Hunt on the ledge of a Limestone Rock—Spring Creek, Texas—Fort Roubidoux—Rampaging of the French in 1780—Grand Battle Scene—Mode of Sculping.

SECTION III.

Chamberlain's Gigantic Mounds and Walls—Sketches above the Hill—Indians at their Games—Robotic Shell Mounds—Ferguson Group—The Landing of Gen. Jackson—Lake Concordia and Aboriginal Tumuli—Huge Mound and the manner of opening them—Odo Parish Monument—De Sen's Burial at White Hills—Hemlock's Rains—Reliquary of Food Boxes—Temple of the Sun by sunset.

Exhibition to commence at 8 every evening, and at 3 o'clock every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon.

Admission - - - - - 25 cents.
Children under 12 - - - - - 12½ "

During the week a FREE ENTERTAINMENT will be given in the Afternoon, for the gratification of the Indian Museum.

PRINTED AT THE MERCURY OFFICE—NEWARK, N. J.

Figure 4.5: Detail of broadside advertising the Egan/Dickeson panorama. Here the panorama's disparate scenes are divided into three sections. (Courtesy of the Penn Museum, image 143336)

Angela Miller convincingly positions this panorama within the context of mid-nineteenth-century “historical anxieties centering on America’s imperial identity during the period of its most rapid territorial expansion” and, more specifically, anxieties about the rise and fall of pre-European civilizations in the Americas – civilizations that could be used to justify contemporary imperial ambitions, or that might challenge those ambitions. The Mound Builder myth, for example, posited an earlier, peaceful, agrarian civilization that had been, it was said,

Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography,” in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1991), 102-103.

supplanted by contemporary, nomadic Indian peoples. Since, according to this myth, present day Indians were not the original inhabitants of the land, America's Indian Removal policies could be justified. America was only doing to Indians what they had done to others. But this idea of past empires lost to history, an idea reinforced by archeological discoveries in Central and South America, also had potential to destabilize the myth of America's exceptional history. Was America merely part of the inevitable rise and fall of nations and empires? Would it too eventually fail?

As Miller points out, the (pseudo)archeological focus of much of the Egan-Dickeson panorama puts it in conversation with such ideas about cycles of empire, about cycles of history. (One thinks of Thomas Cole's famous series *The Course of Empire* (1833-36).) This panorama does not seem to separate contemporary Indians from a past "Mound Builder" culture, however. Miller notes that the handbill advertising the lecture and panorama "refers to 'Indian mounds,' 'aboriginal monuments,' and 'antiquities and customs of the unhistoried Indian tribes,'" denying Indian peoples a history while simultaneously and paradoxically linking mounds and monuments to Indians. Yet, Miller continues, "there *is* a sharp historical division between a monumental past and a present whose achievements appear distinctly minor" within the panorama.¹¹⁵ Contemporary Indians look back on a distant past within the panorama's scenes, or are positioned somehow next to, but separate from, that past, as in the scene of the excavation of the burial mound. A kind of degeneration seems implicit, and the land lies in wait for a new empire that has not yet arrived – a future implied by the arm of the tourist gesturing toward the horizon.

While there are, of course, great differences between the popular forms of the moving panorama, viewed in its entirety in one lecture or performance, and the fragmentation of the

¹¹⁵ Miller, 19.

serialized novel, which unfolds over a longer, non-contiguous period of time, there are also parallels in the episodic nature of each popular genre, which one cannot take in all at once and which is structured by ruptures in a seemingly sequential form. Depicting the Mississippi Valley as a place of layered, conjoined histories – of layers of Indian bones over time, of layers of African-American labor, of layers of white gazes – in a popular, traveling format at once linear and layered, the Egan-Dickeson panorama, like Southworth and Lippard's serialized fiction, evokes tensions between simultaneity and overlap and a sense of forward movement in its content and its form. Popular forms that circulate and move across the landscape, the serial and the panorama are associated with a kind of speed – a modern, industrial temporality – that the works discussed in this chapter simultaneously complicate. The cross-section of the Indian burial mound depicts times past, but that time stretches into the present. The stationary spectator sees history move back and forth before her eyes in three sections of forty-five scenes to be repeated in the next lecture, in the next town. The resulting sense of conjuncture complicates the very knowledge of a landscape and its past that Dickeson's illustrated lecture ostensibly set out to provide.

The Egan-Dickeson panorama's challenge to a linear sense of historical knowledge is, of course, an unintentional by-product of its eager project of knowing and displaying the past in relation to the present, whereas Southworth and Lippard cultivate, beneath their fictions, a "popular radicalism of the center," explicitly challenging the status quo even as they paradoxically draw upon stereotypical, sensational plots and images. In creating their popular fictions Southworth and Lippard also sought to add fictional alternative histories and voices to the conjunctures they depict – from Lippard's masses to Southworth's women who will someday

be “lieutenant-colonels” themselves – fictional histories that point to actual, and fabricated, hidden histories.

“Digging up Turf”: The Pit’s Unsettled Popular Center

In the same decades when popular story papers like those that published Southworth and Lippard’s work in serial form flourished, in the decades when moving panoramas themselves traveled from city to city and town to town, nineteenth-century American histories were being written and published as serials themselves, albeit different kinds of serials - long narratives that stretch out over space and time, linear narratives of progress that tend to ignore certain aspects of America’s past. In 1834, for example, George Bancroft published the first volume of his *History of the United States of America*, which would appear in ten volumes over the next four decades. Covering the period from the discovery of the continent to the conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1782, Bancroft’s *History* became the magisterial work of nineteenth-century history. That Bancroft and his peers – Prescott, Parkman – were cultivating a now familiar narrative of providential progress for the young nation through their histories is, of course, well established. So too are the elisions involved in crafting that narrative, the elision of slavery and the dismissal of American Indians only the most obvious of these gaps. Faced with the challenge of crafting a past that would support an exceptional present and future, these historians wrote eloquent, expansive histories for an expanding country, in Bancroft’s case a history that would spread to ten volumes over forty years, replicating its project in its material form and temporal duration.

Later in the century, popular histories sold as advance subscriptions raised new complications regarding the duration and space of historical narrative. Since subscribers agreed to pay for a certain number of volumes before the text was written, authors were then required to

fit a certain length of historical time into a certain number of pages, and frequently did not budget correctly, resulting in impressive time/space compressions. For example, Sydney Gay, who wrote *Bryant's Popular History* (1883) for William Cullen Bryant, spent half of the series on the colonial era and was then required to fit the period from 1780-1876 into the last volume.¹¹⁶ As Southworth sometimes struggled to fit her preconceived tale or “family history” within the space of one serial number, popular history authors found themselves having to fit the “giant” of American history onto a “Procrustean bed,” eliding and compressing events to accommodate the constraints placed upon them by the requirements of writing for a paying public. The history told became, in part, a matter of the space available in which to tell it.

Capitola's pit and Isora's secret stairway, themselves stereotypes inherent to popular, sensational, serialized genres, offer a simultaneity, compression, and multiplicity that stands in opposition to the linear narratives of such contemporary histories, however “compressed.” There are many stories here. Mrs. Condiment's explanation of the trap-door's history differs from Old Hurricane's explanation, yet both seem “true.” In *'Bel of Prairie Eden*, the view from beyond Isora's stairway holds within it Aztec, Spanish, and American perspectives, however compromised. And both novels privilege alternative histories, to varying degrees. In raising the specter of frontier violence, slave labor, silenced women, and destitute women and children, these popular fictions draw attention to pasts not privileged by dominant narratives while, in

¹¹⁶ Gregory M. Pfitzer, *Popular History and the Literary Marketplace*, 110. Other late nineteenth-century examples include Edward S. Ellis's *Popular History of the World: From Dawn of Information to the Present Time* (1900), a 567 page world history that spent 301 pages on the United States and 188 pages on everything else, and Edward Eggleston's *The Beginners of a Nation* (1897), which devoted 350 pages to the period between 1607 and 1650. It was estimated that, at that pace, the work would require 50 volumes in total. See Pfitzer, 251; 217.

their serial forms, toying with the time of telling – with relationships between the time and space of narrative as it relates to the space of territory.

In the process, they also *make* popular histories. *The Hidden Hand* inspired stage plays, and led people to name everything from boats to children after Capitola so that the character took on a history of her own. In a later novel, *Ishmael or, In the Depths* (1876), Southworth's eponymous character raises himself from poverty to fame as a great lawyer with a passion for defending wronged women. As a boy his models are the greats of American history who he reads about in an illustrated "History of the United States." Ishmael continually bases his actions on those of George Washington, Israel Putnam, Francis Marion, and a litany of other American "greats," asking himself how they would act in a given situation. Eventually, however, he begins to use Christianity, rather than stock narratives of American history, as a model, and to turn to self, forging his own story. Southworth claimed to have modeled Ishmael on a true historical figure, though whether that was truly the case is not entirely clear. Readers treated Ishmael, like Capitola, as if he had been real, however, and the "self-raised" man who had once relied on popular history became popular history, continuing Southworth's project of giving voice to the silenced through his (fictional) legal work and inspiring personal history.

Lippard is better known for succeeding "not only in embellishing history but also in helping to create it."¹¹⁷ The mythology surrounding the July 4, 1776 ringing of the Liberty Bell is only his most well-known construction. Lippard, writes David Reynolds, "believed he was performing an inestimable service to his country by adding color, warmth, and patriotic emphasis to dry history."¹¹⁸ Like William Gilmore Simms, who speaks of fleshing out the "dry bones of history," for Lippard the past needed to be popularized and accessible; it required an imaginative

¹¹⁷ David S. Reynolds, *George Lippard* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 72.

¹¹⁸ Reynolds, 66.

touch. Looking to the past as a simpler time that had much to teach the present, Lippard also saw the “cruelty and violence” in past eras as he actively grappled “with past events and current problems in an effort to make combinations that had never been expressed before.”¹¹⁹ Thus Lippard gave his readers not only the familiar layering of Scott and Cortes, but built the walls of Monk Hall upon the bedrock of Revolutionary Philadelphia, and merged Biblical and Revolutionary scenes in some of his Revolutionary War novels.¹²⁰ Focusing on glorious generals and epic moments as well as poor soldiers, Lippard is now remembered for giving voice to the common person through his embellished popular histories. As Southworth offered readers what they wanted, with a subversive touch, Lippard shaped the nation’s patriotic self-image as he critiqued the nation’s present and created “histories” that had people digging pits, literally, looking for hidden histories that did not necessarily exist. As Reynolds notes, “As recently as 1919 historians were still digging up turf in the Brandywine area searching for the remains of Lord Percy of Monthermer, unaware that Percy was merely a creation of Lippard’s fancy.”¹²¹

As Capitola hovers over Hurricane Hall’s trap-door, a light only making “the horrible darkness ‘visible’,” these works trouble the legibility of views of the past. Through their popular forms, they reveal anxieties about dominant narratives that ignore alternative stories – of women, of Indians, of slaves – even as they rely on dominant narrative stereotypes to produce alternative histories. In their serial structures of repetition and return that bring characters back from the dead, and that layer spaces over intervals of narrative and publication time, the fictions discussed in this chapter challenge a clear, linear story of America’s past. They highlight previous conflicts that recur in the present, and multiple narratives of veiled pasts (clear in Mrs. Condiment’s “great, black, deep, vacuity”). They raise questions about truth telling and about

¹¹⁹ Reynolds, 69.

¹²⁰ See Reynolds, 69-70.

¹²¹ Reynolds, 71-72.

who speaks for whom in fictions full of deceit and manipulation. Although stereotypically sensational in different ways (in many senses Southworth returns some of the agency that Lippard denies his female characters, whose bodies serve as metonyms for land taken through violence), these fictions draw on a “popular center” to challenge visions of the past and relationships between past and present (though Lippard admittedly does this more obliquely, supportive as he was of the U.S.-Mexico war, whereas Southworth’s narrator in *The Hidden Hand* expresses disdain for the war).

Presenting the past of the American landscape as a palimpsest, these texts simultaneously travel around the space of America as they look down into it, moving from New York to Virginia to Saint Louis to New Orleans to Mexico, from Philadelphia to Texas to Vera Cruz and back to Philadelphia over the weekly intervals of their publication. As the Egan-Dickeson panorama harnesses the space of the Mississippi to present a visual medley of moments that belie the linearity and the falsely totalizing glimpse of the panoramic view, *The Hidden Hand* and *'Bel of Prairie Eden* stretch out over narrative and geographical space, yet ultimately show stories of the past and of landscapes to be layered one on the other. And as Southworth and Lippard themselves “dropped out” of the story of nineteenth-century American literature for decades, their popular, sprawling, stereotypically sensational novels relegating them to the margins of literary studies - as moving panoramas painted on lightweight muslin to help them travel were ruined or lost rather than preserved - these fleeting, popular forms provide insights into alternative cultural histories that themselves evoke unsettled historical perspectives.

Coda: The Great Hole of History

Like Southworth and Lippard's popular serial fictions, the unsettled and unsettling perspective offered by the *Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*, which depicts multiple times and spaces in a superficially linear form that is anything but linear, brings hidden histories to light and also draws attention to the processes by which histories are constructed. Through its fragmented formal qualities and its linearity that resists linearity, the panorama challenges viewers to read the landscape and to construct a temporal narrative, but it also highlights the labor - the difficulty - of that task. It highlights the instability of settlement. It shows how the settler project is always intertwined with unsettling relationships to other peoples and other stories about space. The image of the burial mound - like Lippard's panoramic view, Southworth's pit, Melville and Black Hawk's Mississippi, Brockden Brown's cave, and Poe's chasms - suggests at once the challenge of rationalizing settler space and the always intertwined problem of crafting a history for space that already contains other stories.

How histories are constructed is, of course, something that has received a great deal of attention in the past decades as postcolonial work has given voice to previously silenced stories – as postmodern thought has allowed critics to deconstruct the stories told of the past. Susan-Lori Parks' *The America Play* (1994), for example, makes this question central to a spectacle that itself yokes the space of the United States, the unsettling work of settlement, race, and labor (all associated with a hole in the ground) to the process of crafting historical narrative.

The America Play takes place in “A great hole. In the middle of nowhere. The hole is an exact replica of The Great Hole of History.”¹ The “original” Great Hole is “back East.” But the

¹ Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1995), 159.

“original” too is a simulacrum, a replica, a theme park featuring parades of historical figures - George Washington, Amerigo Vespucci, Marcus Garvey... “Mistufer Columbus even,” a list that echoes the catalogs of historical figures occasionally offered (earnestly) by Simms, and (more questioningly) by Melville’s confidence man, by Southworth, and by Lippard.² The Foundling Father/Lesser Known, an (African-American) Abraham Lincoln look-alike whose favorite activity is impersonating the former President, is a (grave)digger who went West: “He got there and he got his plot he staked his claim he tried his hand at his own Big Hole.”³ In the play’s first act, the Foundling Father/Lesser Known plays Lincoln. He is repeatedly shot by people impersonating John Wilkes Booth. In the second act, the Foundling Father is dead (though he returns to be reburied) and his wife Lucy and son Brazil (a name invoking a wider history of the Americas, of racism, of slavery) are digging in the Foundling Father’s Hole, and listening for his whispers.

No brief summary of Parks’ play can capture its complexities – its ironies, word play, and how meaning accumulates, or unravels, through what Parks has called “Repetition and Revision.”⁴ As a metaphor for history, the image of the “Great Hole” at once seems familiar (the past is below, is in the ground, is buried, is uncovered, haunts) and perplexingly disorienting (the grotesqueness of the idea of a theme park, of parades of simulated historical figures, is intentionally unnerving). As a play partly about the making of history through simulation and repetition, each performance has its characters digging that hole, again, and again.

One of the things that makes *The America Play* so fascinating is its overt self-consciousness about its own performance and the performance of the past. In presenting “bits and pieces” (parts of the w(hole)) that characters and audience members struggle to put “in

² Parks, 180.

³ Parks, 163.

⁴ See Parks, “Elements of Style,” in *The America Play and Other Works*, 8-10.

place,” it enacts a (re)construction of the past at every turn.⁵ In literalizing questions about knowing “thuh real thing from thuh echo. Thuh truth from thuh hearsay” through the bizarre image of the Lesser Known’s simulation of Lincoln, the play makes questions about historical authenticity and the choices involved in representing the past visually present on the stage.⁶ Toward the beginning of Act One, the Foundling Father/Lesser Known decides to wear a blonde Lincoln beard from his collection for “variety,” presenting a seemingly meaningless counterfactual (“Let us pretend for a moment that our beloved Mr. Lincoln was a blonde”) and a biting point about the narration of the past in the present: “Some inaccuracies are good for business.”⁷

In the Second Act Brazil briefly becomes a carney, calling onlookers to view relics of the past: “one of Mr. Washingtons bones, right pointer so they say...his wooden teeth...uh bust of Mr. Lincoln carved of marble...Uh glass tradin bead – one of thuh first...uh dried scrap of whales blubber...several documents: peace pacts, writs, bills of sale, treaties, notices, handbills and circulars, freein papers, summonses, declarations of war, addresses, title deeds, obits.”⁸ Displaying the material of history, and material made history through commodification and myth in a way that suggests both a nineteenth-century Barnum-esque “Hall of Wonders” and the historical archive, Brazil calls onlookers to the work of historicizing as he continues to dig for relics to add to the Hall of Wonders.

“Keep it tuh scale,” Lucy repeatedly admonishes Brazil as he first lists these objects and then begins to narrate pasts for them.⁹ With this phrase she yokes the work of narrating the past to notions of space and territory made most explicit in the image of the Hole itself. Keeping his

⁵ Parks, 186; 177.

⁶ Parks, 175.

⁷ Parks, 168. Throughout the play “fakin” and “diggin” are linked.

⁸ Parks, 185-186.

⁹ Parks, 186, and elsewhere.

imaginings “to scale” presumably makes the work of historical emplotment contingent on tracing boundaries based on “truth” and probability. But, of course, the question of what that scale is when the Hole they are digging was the Foundling Father’s “biggest venture to date” remains open.¹⁰

Spatial metaphors for time and for the construction of history appear throughout the play. (“The passage of time. The crossing of space. The Lesser Known recorded his every movement.”)¹¹ “The Great Mans [Lincoln’s] deeds had transpired,” the Foundling Father says, “during the life of the Great Man somewhere in past-land that is somewhere ‘back there’.”¹² The Foundling Father/Lesser Man, “trying somehow to follow in the Great Mans footsteps footsteps that were of course behind him...maybe running too fast in the wrong direction,” we are told.¹³ Spatializing the Lesser Known’s pursuit of the past as both a catching up (a movement forward) and a running back so that the past (the historical Lincoln) has to catch him, Parks forces us to acknowledge the spatial metaphors that often govern thinking about the past and how these metaphors construct or cloud our perceptions. At the same time, this image itself echoes the language of echoing, of repetition, that pervades the play from its opening line: “To stop too fearful and too faint to go.”¹⁴ Here Parks provides an example of chiasmus in which the first and second parts of the sentence mirror each other. As the halves of the sentence look back at each other (as Poe’s Too-wit sees his reflection endlessly reflected as he stands between mirrors), the “Great” and “Lesser” men, past and present, chase, or run toward, each other.

While time and history are abstractly spatialized throughout the play, the geographic space of the United States is invoked as well. The “East” is presented as an “original”

¹⁰ Parks, 179.

¹¹ Parks, 170.

¹² Parks, 171.

¹³ Parks, 171.

¹⁴ Parks, 159.

replication, while the “West” contains the new hole that could only be started after the Foundling Father “Cleared thuh path tamed the wilderness,” echoing the rhetoric of standard American master narratives.¹⁵ And as Brazil digs, as the (resurrected) Foundling Father recites the Gettysburg Address and narrates the death of Lincoln yet again, the two also recite state capitals, populating a verbal map with individual points from Indianapolis to Baton Rouge, from Honolulu to Juneau to, of course, Lincoln, Nebraska. The geographical space of the nation is reconstituted in the spaces between historical events through this recitation – or perhaps the events occur between the punctuation of the map with the familiar names. Reciting the language of the past and the language of place as if memorized in school, these litanies seem laden with meaning, and yet also empty recitations.

If the past is a foreign country, *The America Play* makes the country’s familiar present, built on the past, foreign. In excavating the space of the United States, in de-familiarizing standard Historical figures (Lincoln) and words (“A crowd pleaser: 4score and 7 years ago...””) that are repeated over and over throughout the play, in her use of dialect, Parks begs the questions: What History? Whose History? Whose Geographies? (The lack of apostrophes indicating possession within the script reinforces these last questions.) At the same time, she spatializes the process, the work, of historicizing in the image of digging the Hole. Of course, the Hole also suggests the gaps and elisions of History, a theme central to Parks’ work as an African-American playwright committed to “making” African-American history. “The history of Literature is in question,” she writes in her essay “Possession,” “And the history of History is in question too...theatre, for me, is the perfect place to ‘make’ history – that is, because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as playwright is to – through literature and the special strange relationship

¹⁵ Parks, 179.

between theatre and real-life – locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down.”¹⁶ When Brazil excitedly proclaims, “This Hole is our inheritance of sorts. My Daddy died and left it to me and Her. And when She goes, Shes gonna give it all to me!!” the irony is clear.¹⁷ He is proud of his “inheritance,” which on one hand attempts to be an impressive spectacle of “Reconstructed Historicities,” and on the other hand is a Hole. In writing her plays, Parks contends, she unpacks this historical absence by engaging with history and the process of historicizing, and she makes history at the same time.

The only occasion when *The America Play*’s surreal action is situated in a specific temporal moment is when Brazil recounts the story of the Father (the Foundling Father/Lesser Man) beginning to teach him his job of weeping. That was on “thuh day he claimed to be the 100th anniversary of the founding of our country.”¹⁸ The Father went West on the 102nd anniversary and Lucy and Brazil have not seen him since. In setting the action of the second half of the play at the very end of and after Reconstruction (if it can really be said to be set in any temporal period at all) Parks ties questions about historical construction and reconstruction to the failures of the Reconstruction period (as they reach forward in time). And, of course, in making Lincoln’s look-alike African-American, Parks dramatizes issues of historical authenticity, repetition, and re-creation in a way that is firmly embedded in her project of locating, and of unsettling, an African-American past.

To end with Parks’ play is not only to gesture toward the Civil War period where the last chapter ended, a period when whatever unity of territorial space might seemed to have been achieved was fractured as states seceded from the Union. It is also to invoke a fragmented form

¹⁶ Parks, “Possession,” in *The America Play and Other Works*, 4.

¹⁷ Parks, 185.

¹⁸ Parks, 182.

of repetition and return that unsettles, that carries the ruptures described in previous chapters to an extreme – an extreme in many ways made possible by contemporary theater. As Parks makes the familiar unfamiliar before the audiences’ eyes she destabilizes mythologized, well-known, plotted narratives and simultaneously has her characters enact alternative processes of narrative emplotment echoed in the texts read throughout this project. Parks’ characters literally dig up the past, as Pym and Peters descend into chasms, as Edgar Huntly digs for evidence of Clithero’s past, as Jefferson’s words and the Egan/Dickeson panorama expose burial mounds to the eye. She invokes the desire for legibility and coherence - of historical narrative, of space – that structures U.S. narratives about itself, and she conjures the complications – of race, of labor, of space – that always underlie those settler narratives. She draws attention to the “hidden hand” of history - of the forces that craft history – as Poe highlights Pym’s narrative assumptions, as Brockden Brown highlights Edgar Huntly’s narrative assumptions, as Melville points to the reproduction of historical “types.”

Parks’ play, of course, also brings issues of visibility to the foreground - issues of the problematic nature of looking and seeing in the context of colonial encounter and settlement that run beneath the surface of this project and that merit further attention. Edgar Huntly’s “blindness,” Lewis’ “camera obscura,” Black Hawk and surveillance, looking into the darkness of Capitola’s pit, looking out over the landscape in Lippard’s novel and in the Mississippi panorama, all raise questions about visual representation, perspective, and scale that are linked to mapping and enclosing spaces and stories, but that I have not been able to adequately address here.

To end with Parks’ play is also to fall back to the beginning, *Pym*-style, to briefly confront questions only hinted at in the Introduction; namely, the question of what it means to

examine ruptures within the nineteenth-century texts discussed here in terms that evoke those that are now often used by authors and artists like Parks to explore the very histories often silenced, often “unrecorded, dismembered, washed out.” As the language of a gothic aesthetic of rupture and haunting has increasingly been harnessed by writers like Toni Morrison, whose novel *Beloved* has become the quintessential gothic neo-slave narrative, often read as a work in which history haunts, it has become associated with the work of resistance – of giving voice to forgotten pasts. Saidiya Hartman, Avery Gordon, Jenny Sharpe, Renée Bergland, and many others have emphasized how African-American and Native-American pasts haunt the present in order to work toward reclaiming the past.¹⁹

Such attention to how voices of the past haunt the present, as well as recent work that complicates the association of the nation with homogenous time and thus with homogenous space in the early Republic and antebellum periods, overlaps with a growing interest in rethinking the narratives told about early American historiographical attitudes as exhibited in historical narrative itself, in historiographical reflections on historical narrative, and in fiction that takes up historiographical problems overtly or covertly.²⁰ Such critical work seeks to re-evaluate how we understand the historical thought of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, illustrating that a linear or homogenous narrative of history was not as pervasive as has

¹⁹ See, for example, Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection and Lose your Mother*; Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jenny Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny*.

²⁰ There is a long tradition of thinking about the nineteenth century in terms of homogenous, linear time, sometimes in opposition to fragmentation or cycles structuring life in earlier periods. See, for example, John Demos, *Circles and Line: The Shape of Life in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). On homogenous time and the nation see, for example, Benedict Anderson's famous concept of “imagined communities.” Anderson, of course, draws on Benjamin's theorization of the “homogenous empty time” of modernity. See Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time* for a recent argument for attention to how multiple temporalities within the antebellum period and its literature disrupt our sense of a uniform nineteenth-century “empty time” – a vision of “a United States inclined toward a single glorious destiny” (5). See also Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time*.

been thought and, concomitantly, that the “post-modern” attitude toward history as narrative was not without forerunners. This work illustrates that some Americans (colonizers and colonized, enslavers and enslaved) grappled with issues of historiographical process and resisted or appropriated the dominant story of providential progress in ways not often recognized.²¹ For example, John Ernest’s *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (2004) draws on the language of rupture, fissures, and fragmentation in examining what might be considered alternate histories of historiography in the nineteenth century. Ernest’s story of African-American historiography emphasizes a kind of syncretic work of adaptation for the ends of resistance as writers and orators sought not just to correct “an inaccurate historical record – for there was no singular record,” but “to reposition or recontextualise historical debate” developing “approaches to historical narration...capable of accounting for the scattered community” and harnessing master narratives of providential progress to alternative, liberatory ends.²² Work like Ernest’s extends a strand of postcolonial thinking back into the nineteenth-century historiographical archive, exploring plural and heterogeneous voices of resistance, even as those voices adopted dominant paradigms.

With the exception of Black Hawk, my attention in this project, on the other hand, has been largely on authors and artists who operated from fairly privileged, Euro-American positions. It is not my intention to appropriate a language of resistance for these authors in a way

²¹ Among those who have identified traces of “post-modern” or “post-structuralist” thinking about (historical) narrative in antebellum texts are: Mark Kamrath, “Charles Brockden Brown and the ‘Art of the Historian’: An Essay Concerning (Post)Modern Historical Understanding” and *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown*; Jeffrey Insko, “Anachronistic Imaginings: *Hope Leslie*’s Challenge to Historicism,” *American Literary History* 16(2), 2001: 179-207, (Insko also has a manuscript-in-progress titled *The Ever-Present Now: American Literary Historiography, 1809-57*); and Bernd Engler and Oliver Scheiding, *Re-visioning the Past: Historical Self-Reflexivity in American Short Fiction* (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1998).

²² Ernest, 50; 65. As such, Ernest writes, “the [African-American] antebellum histories were necessarily commentaries on, and events in, a historical story that was very much *about* the writing of history” (51).

that establishes a sense of hegemony, re-inscribing the lacunae that postcolonial discussions of gaps and of haunting seek to address. I seek, rather, to point to how the texts discussed here are unsettled from within, both in relation to the work of settling and claiming land and in relation to the work of crafting settled narratives about the pasts of that land. As these authors made histories (overtly “fictional” or not), and as they reflected on making history, they demonstrated an awareness of the fraught nature of that process and of the settler context that has not often been adequately recognized.

Various resisting and critiquing certain hegemonic discourses, they also adopted these discourses: Poe’s *Pym* has been seen to reinforce racial difference, Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* takes up a discourse of savagism, *The Confidence-Man* engages the language of “Indian-hating,” Southworth and Lippard harness the conventions of popular sensation fiction. But in the process these authors draw attention to problems of interpretation and representation, to the epistemological crises, inherent to the colonial settler context. Indeed, as Edward Watts has proposed, the tension between these stereotypical discourses and the ways in which they inherently fail to contain, to enclose, to settle, is part of what a settler postcolonial reading practice growing out of work done in other settler nations might allow American literary studies to examine.²³ The texts discussed in this project, from Brockden Brown’s historical essays that point to the need to attend to evidence and probability when hewing “stones into just proportions, and pil[ing] them up into convenient and magnificent fabrics,” to Lippard’s fictionalized histories crafted to draw attention to the trials of those whose lives went unnarrated, highlight the work of emplotting pasts and spaces. They show that awareness of how the raw materials of

²³ Again, see Watts, “Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy”; Chandan Reddy, “Globality and the Ends of the Nation-Form: A Response to Edward Watts,” *American Literary History*, vol. 22, no. 2, Summer 2010, 471-479.

history are interpreted and arranged, and awareness of the power of those arrangements to structure knowledge in a way that creates future knowledge (as the division of space, of territory, structures thinking about that space), challenged master narratives of providential progress often thought to have governed thinking about space and time in the first half of the nineteenth century. Attention to that earlier awareness can help us to reconsider how our own thinking about the past, its spaces, and its texts might be emplotted, especially as we “dig” in the archive and engage in our own literary recovery work.

In his recent book *Dark Writing: geography, performance, design*, Paul Carter asks, “Could we read – and write – our environment in a way that did not mummify its dynamic character?”²⁴ He seeks a new reading practice that will preserve the movement that underlies our understandings of place and our sense of place making. While Carter’s call in this book is, in part, for the contemporary design world to draw and think “movement back into the design of places,” it grows out of his earlier work on “spatial history.”²⁵ In *The Road to Botany Bay*, for example, Carter explores the “spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence...spatiality as a form of non-linear writing; as a form of history.”²⁶ He examines, as he puts it in *Dark Writing*, imperialism’s “spatial sleight of hand,” how “imperial history...repressed [the] collective act of bringing space into being.”²⁷ “The literature of spatial history,” Carter writes in *The Road to Botany Bay*, “the letters home, the explorers’ journals, the unfinished maps – are written traces which, but for their spatial occasion, would not have come into being. They

²⁴ Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: geography, performance, design* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 5.

²⁵ Carter, *Dark Writing*, 12.

²⁶ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1987), xxii.

²⁷ Carter, *Dark Writing*, 17.

are not like novels; their narratives do not conform to the rules of cause-and-effect empirical history. Rather, they are analogous to unfinished maps and should be read accordingly as records of travelling.”²⁸ Such journals and unfinished maps, Carter writes, show that explorers and settlers who imagined “the physical landscape in terms of a mental landscape characterized by linearity” had to confront “a spatial history composed of gaps,” gaps that had to be repressed.²⁹ Carter’s work re-introduces “the trace of a movement history,” even into the maps of colonial surveyors.³⁰ He seeks to track the passages, the rhythms, that “determined what came into view but also how it was viewed.”³¹

The narratives and novels discussed in this project, I argue, can also be read for how they “preserve the trace of a movement history” – for how they highlight epistemological processes and passages of space-making and meaning-making rather than physical and mental landscapes characterized by imagined linearity. These narratives *do not*, in fact, “conform to the rules of cause-and-effect empirical history.” Harnessing topographical, geographical images like gaps and chasms that often served as metaphors for states of knowledge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these texts, like the explorers’ journals that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* draws upon, are analogous to unfinished maps and can be read as records of traveling. These works too have an active engagement with the terrain and the horizon. Through their own rhythms – their serial forms – they point “to a kind of history where travelling is a process of *continually* beginning, continually ending, where discovery and settlement belong to the same exploratory process.”³² Reading such texts for how they capture the simultaneity of settlement, for how they contain within them not just anxieties about *the fact* of repressed

²⁸ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xxii.

²⁹ Carter, *Dark Writing*, 33; 35.

³⁰ Carter, *Dark Writing*, 5.

³¹ Carter, *Dark Writing*, 20.

³² Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xxiv.

histories of unimaginable spaces, of racial violence, of the tracks of people already inhabiting spaces being claimed and settled, but also for how they themselves reproduce the movement of encounter and settlement, how they draw attention to the process of meaning-making, might help us to, as Carter puts it, “understand the present-day rhetoric of white settler nations” and to address his probing question, “Could we inhabit our histories differently?”³³ For American literary studies, turning across geographical borders to work like Carter’s on Australia, and across disciplinary borders, to his work that merges history, geography, art, and visibility, can help us to texture histories of events, and of spaces, together – as they intersect. In the first half of the nineteenth century, as the United States looked west past the Mississippi, south toward Mexico, and even south toward Antarctica, the plotting of space and of historical narrative central to the settler project remained a consistently unsettled process rather than a finished fact, despite the construction of spatial and narrative myths intended to erase that process. Acknowledging how texts contain and reflect on this movement can help us to unsettle our own readings and to continue to give voice to other histories and other geographies.

³³ Carter, *Dark Writing*, 17; 19.

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